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# The Great Emancipator

• Robert Joe Stout

According to Keltner, who wrote the only account at the time, Ronald Toms met the Great Emancipator on board the Santa Fé daylight express going west to Kansas City. Toms was a young man, just over thirty, but had already begun to "lecture" (the term he used to describe his political activities). The railroads were still indulgent of passenger service then, and the express often carried enough people that the evening meal was served in two shifts. I don't think Toms had a table reservation—the porters ordinarily handed them out and were very careful that no Negroes were seated at adjoining tables with whites. Nor do I think he insulted anyone or made an attempt to attract attention. He just walked in quietly, nodding perhaps to one of his own race in a white waiter's uniform, and strolled past crowded tables toward the end of the diner where a tall man in a business suit was bent over an empty plate reading.

The small towns of Missouri, though integrating, still belonged culturally to the rural South. The two posts on which the state's rusted and over-repaired prosperity hung, Kansas City and St. Louis, were as distant and different from the rooted farm population as the medieval castle had been from its serfs. Unfortunately, on this day almost twenty years ago, serfs controlled the dining car. Keltner didn't specify who they were ("... a rough element, such

as at that time might be found anywhere between St. Louis and Kansas City . . ."), but one needn't have traveled the region to get a glimpse of their personalities. They had been drinking and bragging and were on the lookout for a squabble.

"Get that nigra outta here!"

"Man! ma salad jist turned over and puked!"

"Give that burrhead some asswipe and tell him to step out back!"

Toms had heard it all before. Politely, almost deferentially, he stopped beside the last table and pulled out a chair. Not directly opposite the tall white, who was on the aisle with his back against the partition, but in the chair next to the window. The white looked up, scowled, and went back to his reading.

A short dumpy man with a small puffed face sauntered up to the table. "Nigra! I'm talkin to you!"

"Is there anywhere I can spit?" Toms answered tersely.

The leer crumpled and tiny white teeth—sharp like a fox's—flashed savagely. Two waiters—big fellows, the white of starched uniforms de-personalizing their black faces—edged through and politely pushed the antagonizer aside. "C'mon," one of them whispered to Toms, "we don't want trouble here. You can eat in the kitch—"

"I prefer to eat here," Toms told the waiters.

Quietly, taking a nod from the

steward, a gangling giraffe with thick lips and a large adam apple, the waiters surrounded Toms, one grabbing his chair while the other bent down to pinion his arms. But his tongue was free and quietly he lacerated their obedience. "Ever hear of the black overseer? The smart owners got a lot of work done that way. 'Make 'em sweat or it's your back'll feel the lash, your Liza get my prick.' Who you got behind you, man? You livin' in my neighborhood or theirs?"

"Sorry, man, we jiss got—"

Plates and silverware clattered as a fist descended on the table. "Leave the gentleman alone!" The waiters jumped back, startled by the fiery eyes and flushed face of the man who had been reading. The steward seemed suddenly to be caught by a fit of silent coughing. His lips jerked and puckered as one bony wrist pumped up to guard against imaginary germs.

"I am not ashamed to eat supper with Mister . . . Toms, isn't it?"

"Ronald Toms."

"Sit down, sit down," the steward obeisantly moved from table to table. Strangely—or not so strangely, perhaps—the ruffians complied. Niggers they could bully, but whites who gave orders with patrician authority were something else. Part of a tradition, perhaps: bankers, lawyers, tax-collectors—that class of men who represented authority—had the power to deprive one of a livelihood, a horse . . . even a son or daughter or wife. One of the waiters, his face a carved expressionless ebony, extracted an order pad from his belt, a pencil from his chest pocket, and bent forward to listen to his customer's order. Whether he was angry or proud—whether he felt defeated or victorious—Keltner didn't say.

"Thanks," Toms murmured. He was as offhanded, as colloquial, as the successful black militants are now, but the structure of animosities hadn't hardened yet and a Negro could thank a white without feeling flunkyish. "You knew my name. How come?"

"My business," he smiled, the lips straight back, his expression photographically blank. "Actually, I saw your photo in a paper a couple of days ago. And I'd read about your speeches. I'm Melvin Querner—perhaps you've heard of me? I'm in Congress. From New Mexico."

Toms, in fact, hadn't heard of him. Querner was a freshman representative, a democrat; he'd prepped for high office by putting ten years in the Air Force and then quitting to go into electronics manufacture. Over supper they talked, Querner asking questions and Toms replying. Like many self-made men, Mel Querner had little experience, some knowledge, and a great deal of curiosity. He had a fine memory and the conviction that all people basically were middle-class and Christian.

He didn't understand Toms's 'evangelizing.' "You say, 'acquaint people with their circumstances.' There's something wrong with the logic: if they're in those circumstances already, they don't need to have them described. And if you describe something else, then you're not 'acquainting them with their circumstances' but trying to convince them that those circumstances are something that they are not."

Toms nodded. He had an annoyingly detached way of talking, the words slipping past his lips while he looked away. Then he would turn suddenly to catch their effect, his

eyes barely visible through half-closed lids.

"All right, suppose . . . do you have children? good—suppose when your son was born, you took one look at him and decided he was inferior. So you keep him away from other kids and keep reminding him that he's dumb, stupid, an animal in human's skin, that he can't piss straight, write his name, that all he wants to do is sleep and suck tit and run around without clothes on. What kind of kid is he gonna grow up to be? Dumb, stupid, an animal. . . ."

"Or a murderer, a revolutionist."

"Murderer . . . maybe. But only if you kick him around, rouse him to retaliation. Murderers aren't numb. A revolutionist is a different animal. Look back over history. Lenin wasn't a poor tromped-on peasant. Neither were the Bostonians. Or Bolivar. Revolutionists come out of the universities, not the soil."

Querner lifted his napkin, stretched it between his fingers, and began to roll it into a long spear. "Yes, all right, that part about revolutionists, yes, but the other. . . ." His own reflection stared back from the dark window. "All right, I know what you're saying, and I agree. Except . . . except well, what-do-you-call-it? your supposition leads away from what we were talking about. It's poetic. What circumstances are your people really in? In the South the laws are against them, I know that, my mother was born in Arkansas. But in the North jobs are opening, and the army and airforce are integrated now; Negroes are going to come back trained to do useful work. They'll be wanted. In twenty years, discrimination as we know it now will have disappeared."

"Will it?"

"Don't you think so?"

Toms slumped forward, elbows against the edge of the table, and laughed. The train was coming into a station; through the grime and condensation on the window, they could see haloes of neon and the nearer, more blurred swinging of switchmen's lanterns. "No," he said, "I don't."

"Why?"

Again Toms laughed. The sounds seem to bruise his throat, or be forced through the larynx of a man suffering from a severe cold. "History," he drawled, shifting from the urbane jazz-talker to the thick mispronunciation of the Delta. Often, in conversations with whites, he'd shift back and forth in an almost musical counterpoint, never letting you forget who he was. "You see a nigra here 'n' there with a suit on, or a printer's apron, drivin' a car, wearin' staff sergeant's stripes, playin' centerfield for the Cards, and you say, 'See, it's coming along, the country's integrating just fine.' But it's a lie. All right, some black people don't start out the way I described. They get a few breaks and they take advantage of them. But remember, while the Rothschilds were building their fortune, thousands of illiterate peddlers with sixpointed stars stitched to their rags were being beaten, burned, herded like cattle from one ghetto to another. How many thousands of years did it take . . . ?"

"That's different."

"Is it?"

Querner shook his head. "The Jewish problem in Europe . . ." he began. But his voice faded, he shrugged, trying to find a way back to something he knew. "Well," he admitted, "that's not my specialty. But I do know it was never the same problem

here . . . with the Jews, I mean. The restrictions were taken away and, well, gradually they moved into the main currents of American life. The same. . . ."

"The Jews who came to this country had enough bread for their passage! Man! they were over there in Russia, in Poland, Lithuania, Turkey, Egypt, sick, starved, butchered. . . . ohman! They were best off in Germany, and you know what happened there. Mister, how many coons you think can read and write? How many you think can drive a car? How many never had not even one new piece of clothes? I could show you towns filled with them. Towns that don't even have roads, where an old sick mule is all fifty families got for transportation. For ploughing. Where there ain't nivvah been a radio, a book, where a white man would—"

"You're going too far."

"No!"

Toms's eyes flashed and Querner jerked away. When he looked back, the Negro was staring out the window, hands clenched so tightly they shone like bars of steel. Except for them, the diner was empty; one waiter unctuously glided past and suggested they might wish "to finish your conversation, *gentlemen*, in the club-car or one of the lounges." Toms nodded, pushing his chair back, but Querner jumped to his feet and shoved his hand across the table. "I respect you . . . sir," he added, wincing when he realized the afterthought possibly was an insult, "but I don't quite believe it. I've been visiting in Arkansas and the Ne— . . . your people there were, well, goshalmighty! treated badly, yes, by my standards and, and by yours, but it was just a matter of prejudice. We need to educate. . . ."

"Sure, an article in *Reader's Digest* now and then should do the trick."

"I didn't say that."

"I know you didn't. But I know where thinking like that leads. From your side of the fence it's all so simple. You pass an edict that Negroes are to be considered equal—that's fine. So your white gentry of Arkansas look at us and mutter ' . . . the dirty illiterate junglebunny, the stupid unclothed nigger who doesn't know how to wipe his ass, gets the same treatment my white friends do?' Get off it, white friend, that ain't enough. We've got to get our heads out of the slime first!"

The shout echoed through the empty diner. Querner turned away, puzzled. Had he not already admired Toms, he might have reacted with anger. The waiters, obviously embarrassed, clattered glassware and silver at their end of the car. "All right," the congressman sighed, "show me."

"What?"

"If . . . if it's as bad . . . as you say . . . well, I'm an elected official, Mister Toms, I represent the people. I want to find out the truth, whatever it is."

Toms stared at him a minute. Apparently he'd closed off after his outbreak, expecting Querner to react more defensively. "All right, Mister Querner," he said hoarsely, hiding something behind his sternness, "you've bought yourself a guide."

Ronald Toms had lecture engagements in Kansas City that weekend, and Querner had congressional business of some kind to attend to. They promised to meet on a Tuesday three weeks away at the home of a white family Toms knew in a suburb of St. Louis. Quite by accident Keltner

talked to both men before they left. A university professor—biologist/geneticist—Keltner was on a grant to study ‘without prejudice or malice’ the inheritable differences between the negroid and caucasian races. Though Southern-born he was an avowed liberal and had arranged for Toms to address several middleclass white audiences (something Toms ordinarily didn’t do).

Keltner’s acquaintance with Querner was more round-about. The congressman had run unsuccessfully for senator two years before his election to the House and been invited, more or less as a liberal, to speak at the University of Texas. Keltner was on the faculty there; they had formed a friendship and at various times intruded upon each other’s kindness for favors or advice. Querner had sent him a note that he’d be passing through Kansas City and Keltner arranged to meet him. As it turned out, Keltner talked to Querner about Toms and, later, to Toms about Querner. He even tried to get invited on the ‘Great Guided Tour’—“... it would have helped my study of Negro characteristics in non-cultural environment immensely . . .” he pouted in a letter. But Toms turned him down. “You’re too smart, you’d blow everything backwards.”

Toms will not be remembered as a dynamic speaker (or ‘activist,’ the more popular term now). Carmichael, Gregory, and others have overshadowed him. They have wit, they know how to insult, they are expert fencers who know their enemy’s weaknesses and embarrassments. Toms derided the NAACP and had an intellectual’s grasp of historical importances but he was not, precisely, anti-Establishment. I think, as an historian, he was afraid of revolution,

afraid an American Stalin would emerge through the victorious class and further repress, rather than raise to equal status, the country’s black citizenry.

In his speeches to black audiences he was softspoken, patient, school-teacherish. “We’re gonna talk,” he’d begin, looking past his listeners at a wall or curtain, “we’re gonna talk about some things that never get said. . . .” He’d mention jobs, wages, unemployment. “Honesty time,” he’d call, “tell me honestly how much you get paid, how many of you work, what your life’s like.” His method smacked a little of prayer meeting, his short thick fingers forcing someone to their feet. “Lottie Matern . . .” she’d g i g g l e self consciously “. . . four children . . . well, I do some maid work and we gets our welfare check. . . .” *Maid work? why not a factory job? a store job?* “. . . they don’t want no niggers . . . anyway, ma man was in jail for two years and when I tell ‘em that. . . .” The same history repeated over and over, the same points hammered home.

“Honesty time . . . how many of you been anywhere by bus? Okay, what did ya see? Rivers, farms, houses—big houses with cars in their driveways, shade trees, backlawn swings. It’s a big land, a beautiful land with lots of room for everyone. But where do you live? You there, c’mom, honesty time, where is it you live? how many people in that room: why, if there’s so much space in this country, why do you live in one cramped room?”

“But is it true?” he’d go on, rubbing his face, pointing, unconsciously imitating the expressions, the modes of speech, the gestures, of the audience in front of him. “What is God

anyway? Shucks! you make him out to be just Mister Bigot Big!" Then, after the laughter, "I don't know, I sure don't. I came out between my mother's legs just like you did, and my sons came out where I put 'em in. That's all I know about life. I don't wanna take away from you that know more—God isn't really my concern. You . . . you . . . you're my concern. Me—I'm my concern. My kids. I want them to have a backyard too, a car, some room. I don't care if it's theirs to own, just so it's there, something they can share, hope for. How they gonna get it? God won't give it to them—God's been around a long time and the world keeps goin' on the way it is. I don't wanna be a saint, I don't wanna suffer for what they say is somebody else's doin'. If I'm gonna go to hell, I wanna go there peacefully. How many of you think you're gonna wind up in hell? Why? You, yeah, you, why you think so?"

Toms was a circuit rider, a self-ordained prophet of a better life. He loved his people and they loved him, I think, although few of them were stirred to priesthood. It's hard to say. Possibly, as in the case of other religions, the seeds that were first sown did not yield harvest until a second generation. At any rate, without backing, without organization, without a 'faith, baby'—the magnetism of a movement—to draw on, he hammered at his niche. Unsuccessfully, it might be said, because there were no direct political results.

Except the Great Emancipator.

Querner, prudent and time-conscious, arrived in St. Louis as scheduled. Keltner met him and they drove through thin December sleet past smokestacks protruding into the over-

cast like the upturned muzzles of old cannons. Ronald Toms was waiting in the McBeaths' living room. Dick McBeath, a journalist and TV writer, had put twelve years in the service before his Communist affiliations before the war had caught up with him. He'd been swiftly discharged—honorably, but without choice—and had hooked on with an ad agency in St. Louis. His wife, Gabriella, ten years his junior, was chubby, outspoken, and slightly alcoholic.

Toms like to drink, Keltner was social but conservative, and Querner a teetotaler. The congressman must have felt uncomfortable in the gathering. He was, after all, an Air Force veteran, legally and loyally discharged, and he had not vocally opposed McCarthyism. Reds, as far as he had always pictured them, were misguided city intellectuals, the unfortunate by-product of the Jewish and Italian ghettos. McBeath and his wife seemed to confuse him, but he quickly ascertained that their friendship with Toms had no political implications. They spent the night there; and the next morning, Querner driving a dented chevvie that Toms had acquired for the journey, they headed south.

Keltner never was able to verify their exact route. Toms may have played games with his congressional companion, leading him on a sort of sociological tour of small-town americana. I have the feeling that he knew where they were headed, although he may have tried to give Querner the impression that they were choosing at random. They cut through southeastern Missouri and crossed into Tennessee, then back into Arkansas and across into the northwestern corner of Mississippi. Twice Toms conducted 'Honesty Time' sessions and

Querner listened, first from a corner of the audience, then within hearing but out of sight behind a closet door.

"Tell me, tell me, honesty time, remember? How much money have you spent this year? What? no, speak up, it's nothing to be ashamed of, what? how much? how much is that? say, let's hear you count from one-to-one hundred . . . what? did you ever go to school? how many grades? five grades . . . you guess five grades. What's this I'm holding, can you see? peers like a dollah? no! dammit, dammit, don't laugh! Hey! honesty time over there, okay, let's hear, what was so funny, what were you laughin' about? jis that he couldn't count nohow? couldn't tell a quarter from a dollar? let me ask you, then, why weren't you crying? Sure, I've heard the story, you don't need to know how to count to push a plough. But you do, you do! Why do you plough anyway? Sure, food for your family, but you've got to buy some of it at a store don't you? Whose store? whose? Casias? He's a black-man, is he? no? okay, honesty time, who here ever caught Casias cheatin' him? one, two, hell, damned near every one of you. And you laugh—laugh cause he's been cheatin' some poor nigger who can't count!

"Listen, let's talk, let's all talk. How much land is there in these hills? Hey there! you, yeah, man, how much land do you own? 'kay, so what if I was to tell you there's gold in these hills? how much land would you own? 'I don' guess any?' Do you . . . dammit! dammit! don't laugh, please don't laugh, listen, you wanna laugh, you should sneak in behind Casias' store some night and listen to him laughin'. God didn't make you dumb. Or if he did, he just meant that you start out that way,

not stay that way always. You don't still suck your mother's tit, do you? Please don't laugh. . . ."

They'd parked the car behind the church where Toms was speaking. He'd made arrangements with someone in the congregation for "me and ma friend" to spend the night, apparently without mentioning that Querner was white. Toms let his 'Honesty Times' run their course—if anything, he prolonged them past his participating audience's patience. "You got ears, you got mouths, you got tongues. . . . I want you to talk, talk . . . if what I said ain't true, you find out what is, you got eyes, you got hands . . . you ask ole God and if he don't answer, don't just sit around and wait, maybe he's figuring you'll do some of the answering yourselves. . . ."

The voices, laughing when Querner stepped out of the building, silenced abruptly. Toms, without explanations, introduced him to the Mathias family—father, wife, brother, and son—and he extended his hand. Eddie Mathias took it, respecting the white man's wishes with a faceless servility. He appeared to be an old man (although Querner later found out that he and Mathias were the same age) with rotten pocked flesh and burned-out eyes that come from years of disease.

"I, ah, I'm traveling with Mister Toms. He and I are . . ." friends he had intended to continue but something stopped him. The silence perhaps. There was no curiosity in the old man's gaze, only a black acceptance in that of his wife. His son, slender, very dark, with a narrow pointed chin, trembled. He was seventeen or eighteen, an age when others are disrespectful and belligerent,

but he betrayed neither anger nor resentment.

"Yass, Mister Qua— . . . ah, Ker— . . . , ah, sir."

A stone dropped in water. The silence lapped outward, encircling the church and the buildings next to it. The rasp of the crickets grew louder as movement in the neighborhood ceased. Uncomfortably, Querner turned from one to another, clearing his throat and beginning sentences that led nowhere. Toms, standing by, didn't try to help. Apparently he wanted Querner to go it alone, to perceive the difficulties and estrangement.

"I ah, we have a few things in the car. . . ."

"Yass."

"Could we, ah, drive you home?"

"It's just right here . . . suh."

"I hope, I ah mean, my coming here, I'm from New Mexico as a matter of fact."

"Yass."

". . . I, ah, met Mister Toms on the train. He's well, very well known—yes, famous, famous, I'd heard I'd heard about his spee— . . . ah, his . . . well, his work and I wanted to see. . . ."

"Yass."

An animal howled. The plaintive lost cry, caught in its own echoes, could have been human. Querner backed away, frowning and reaching towards the door for a frame to lean against. "I'm afraid I'm not wanted here," he said quietly to Toms.

"They're afraid."

"Of me?"

Gently, back in his role of 'Honesty Time,' Toms laughed. "Tell him," he said lightly, glancing from face to face. His eyes caught the boy's. "Go on, you're grown up, you tell him why you're afraid."

Like a rabbit or squirrel caught between points of safety, the boy jerked his head, looking at the church, the unpaved road, his father's face, then Querner's. "I'm not afraid," he lied, "I just, well, I don't know what he wants, that's all."

"Honest now, honest."

"I just don't know what he wants!" the boy insisted. Laughter flickered through his eyes, across his mouth; he coughed and let his tongue probe his lips. Again he looked at Querner, then jerked away, talking hurriedly. "I can read, I've seen a few things. Like at school, our teacher—the one from across the ride—she says be careful, there's folks up North that help us, that, I mean, sometimes they don't know what they're doin', sometimes they make it worse instead of better. That there's no way to change the whites around here."

Gulping, he gaped at Toms, surprised and embarrassed by his outburst. His mother had stiffened and lifted one hand toward his shoulder as though wanting to stop him. She was a stocky woman with a square ugly face—ugly because of the world she lived in and what it had done to her. But she didn't say anything, and the boy, to protect himself, went on jabbering.

"Careful? why did she say 'be careful'?" Toms interrupted.

"Well, they mean to help, but they can't change the whites around here."

"What are the whites around here like?"

The boy giggled and started to answer, but his uncle, behind him, guffawed. Not noisily—almost soundlessly, a donkey's bray. The boy stopped, looking down at his feet, his lips puckerred and jawbones set.

"Honesty Ti—. . . ."

"Shutup yas Honest Time!"

Querner stiffened, watching Toms as the uncle moved forward. He resembled his brother but was shorter and more thickly built. One shoulder apparently had been injured, perhaps broken; his elbow protruded to the front and the palm of his hand was twisted away from his body. When he spoke, the white spikes of his few remaining teeth gleamed in the darkness.

"Honest!" he repeated. The word seemed to scrape against metal coming through his throat. The power he projected was mostly visual; he spoke as though shouting but the sound was dim and gravelly.

"You don know honest! I'll tell you—G-God! He honest, he T-Truth. I tell you, we done anger God! Our sins done anger him, and we pay, we gonna pay till ever one of us git down and pray! You, you gits up shouting how we not to laugh, but you don say we should fall down on our face and tell God what we is. Aint no black man anywhere getting forgived till ever one of us fall down and say what we done. God put us here! G-God! He wants us the way . . . we is!"

But the attempt to shout, to be dynamic, ripped his throat, and the last words were barely distinguishable. He slumped forward, coughing, his hand at his throat, but lost balance and fell forward, catching himself with his one good arm, and vomited across his fingers. Without apology, the family turned away, the boy moving in front of his uncle. Toms was now at one point of the semicircle, Eddie Mathias at the other. The uncle, again behind them, coughed and spit. From the doorway, Querner watched. When he looked up, banishing whatever feelings the incident had caused in him, Toms and

the Mathiases were talking about beds, coal oil, and mules.

Without volition the congressman followed them along the path that rutted downhill past weather-beaten shacks. None of them had ever been painted and the boards were buckled and cracked. Toms caught him staring and signaled for the others to stop.

"Yes, welcome to Mustard Heights," he murmured, probing Querner for reactions. "You might have heard of it—'nigratown'? Yeah, exclusive, man. . . ." Mathias's wife laughed, a harsh explosion of sounds so mechanical, Querner couldn't guess their intent, and Toms sighed. He was no good at that kind of thing and looked away. "kay, you wanted to see, cmon. Who lives here?" he asked Mathias, "the preacher? How many preachers in this settlement—four, five. . . ?"

"Four. That's the church, there in front."

A dog darted from beneath the structure's sagging rear porch. The moon was up, and a lantern swinging in the unshaded window of the house next door provided enough illumination that Querner could make out the details. The dog, yapping loudly, leaped against a sheet of rusted metal, one of several that had been propped across holes in the chicken-wire fence.

The small yard, littered with cans, garbage, and manure, enclosed the back of the house—two rooms apparently tacked at different times onto the back of the "church," an oblong unwindowed box nailed together from boards of different lengths and different vintages. The house itself was on stilts, but those under the narrow porch had given way and the back door was off its bottom

hinges. Cardboard and flattened tin cans were collaged across what should have been a window.

"The church," Toms repeated, scowling at the hysterical dog. Querner, beside him, nodded. The barking had aroused someone inside; the door opened and a stooped, heavy-set woman peered out. Behind her the men could see an iron bedstead, a wood-stove, and a picture of Christ cut from an old calendar.

"Who that?"

The Mathiases shouted an answer, and the woman grunted and stepped onto the porch and from it to the ground. The dog was still yapping but she didn't call it off; apparently she was used to it. "That speaker-man, he gone?"

"He with us."

She stopped, squinting through the darkness. "Ah!" she commented, pronouncing the word as though it had meaning. "Shut up!" she called to the dog, finally, shrugging and coming towards them again, "Dick tole me not to go. He say you a devil's nigger."

"I'm a truthful nigger."

The woman raised her eyes. Instead of Toms, she saw Querner. Her mouth stiffened, then the lips began to jerk, one side of her mouth flicking into her flat cheek as she backed away. The dog, reacting to her behavior, rushed against the fence, yapping; the Mathias boy cursed him as the woman stumbled across the yard, hand lifted as though to defend herself. She fell across the backstep onto the porch and cried out to someone inside. But the lantern next door went out, and they could not see who came out to help her.

Possibly Toms guessed the reason for her panic. The Mathiases didn't speak; in all outward appearances,

it was as though nothing had happened. The god-fearing sick brother, who had been sluffing along behind them, had caught up and Mrs. Mathias stepped back to walk with him. The other houses along the path were even more dilapidated than the church. None were lighted except for an occasional coal oil lamp and all smelled of excretion and garbage.

"Well, Mister Querner, are you gonna ask?"

"Ask?"

"What scared her?"

"I..."*don't know* he seemed about to continue. Life virtually had overturned on top of him, the bright white glory of America curdled beneath the night world of mold and sickness, and he didn't know how to react or how much really was real.

"Tell us," Toms directed the son.

A giggle caught in the young man's throat. He shrugged, exaggerating the movement, and glanced at his father.

"No need," the elder Mathias mumbled, "everybody knows."

"I don't know," Toms replied.

"You know."

"Mister Querner doesn't."

The father shrugged. "No need," he repeated, but his wife, behind them, hissed, "He don't want to know!"

"Do you, Mister Querner?"

The congressman stopped and glared at Toms, trying to read something in his eyes. But the Negro looked away, laughter waiting at the corners of his mouth. "I want to know," Querner answered self-consciously, then repeated, "yes, I want to know."

The father frowned, pawing at the ground with one foot. He wore mismatched shoes, Querner noticed; one was several sizes larger than the

other. "Well!" the son began, then retracted, startled by his own effervescence. The uncle spit and tried to interrupt, but his voice was gone and he couldn't get anyone's attention.

"She don't like whites," Eddie Mathias hesitated, looking from Querner to Toms, "she had a—a bad experience."

"Rape?" Toms asked.

Mathias nodded; his son giggled, the sound escaping through closed lips. There seemed no need to say more, but Toms, for some reason, was persistent.

"How old was she?"

Again the father shrugged. "Oh," he mumbled, "old enough. She wasn't too. . . ."

"She was!" Mathias's wife burst, thrusting her heavy body between him and Querner. "There wasn't no harm, there wasn't no place around here they could go; they didn't mean no sin, they just kids! It was the dogs found 'em and when he jumped up, the men saw and came runnin' up and found her, not a rag on an' just twelve an' they started to tease her an. . . ."

"Don't, woman, no need. . . ."

"He wants to hear!" She spun, facing Querner, but her courage snapped and she began to tremble. Toms stepped up to her, waving her husband back.

"How many of them?" he asked, trying to leash his anger, "six, seven, eight? Big men out huntin', big men—men with white children back in town? men with shotguns? whiskey? And there was that little naked black girl caught with her lover? Yeah, we get the picture, how long'd it last? all afternoon? afternoon and night? one after the other jumpin' on her? Was she conscious when you found

her?" He paused and looked at each of them. "Was she?" he repeated, softly but with power.

"No!" The uncle's mouth jerked open, lips pulling back to show the snaggle teeth, but the word was soft, a whisper. Querner was shivering—he'd obviously been able to imagine the raping and was trying to drive it out of his sight. The grinning old fanatic coughed, drawing closer and staring. "The dogs too!" he croaked, "the dogs got theirs, too!"

"Hush, crazyman!"

"We've got to get our heads out of the slime," Toms whispered. Querner nodded, trying to find something to look at, something that didn't affront or accuse. But again the woman interrupted.

"That ain't why she run."

Toms was watching Querner now, his smile biting downwards as though it hurt. The congressman shook his head, avoiding the knowledge his friend's glance implied. "Then why?" Toms asked.

"Cause a the baby."

"God, no!" Querner groaned but the woman didn't hear him.

"The baby," she repeated, beginning to lose courage again. But Toms was beside her, nodding, and she hurried on, ". . . she kilt it, right after 't was born, stuck it and stuck it and stuck it and it died and Clodia came and said weren't no white man's chile, 'twere that boy's chile and she'd already had it in her when they got to her. 'Twere just six months and couldna been no white man's chile. Her boy done run off—north, went north—and somby tolle her the sherf would git her cause she kilt her own babe-chile, but the sherf don't care how no black chile dies."

Querner wiped his face. Toms, without tears, was crying. Or laugh-

ing so bitterly it sounded like weeping. The others looked away: it was part of their lives and they were used to hearing it. "The dogs too!" the addled uncle insisted, and the woman spit on him. "Supper, woman," old Mathias muttered, "it's time these men got food to eat." She nodded. Querner lifted his hand as though to gesture her back, but she didn't notice or chose to ignore him. "We've got our good folk too," the old man tried to assure them, but neither Toms nor Querner was listening. They turned like phantoms, shadows, the automatons of once-free men, to follow the son past brambles and broken fence into an unpainted house.

Three rooms, six children. Querner sat on one of the two chairs, Eddie Mathias the other, while the women fixed cabbage, potatoes, and sour sausages on an old oil range. Toms wanted to leave the car (in which he and Querner planned to spend the night) and acquire a couple of riding mules. "The car," he explained, "won't be any good up the hills or across the mudflats." Mules were hard to come by and couldn't be spared. Mathias suggested the names of two whites, but Toms didn't want to rent from a white. Finally, they agreed to head out on foot and leave the car temporarily, then return if they couldn't borrow animals from some sharecropper.

Two of the children, Querner learned, weren't Mathiases. The oldest girl, Ina, thin, vivacious (but unlaughing), was the older son's betrothed, and little Willie was an orphan, the illegitimate son of a tuberculosis victim. Two of their own children had died. Eddie explained, and two were gone: a boy fourteen who was working in Gadsden and a fif-

teen-year-old married daughter.

Ina impressed Querner, and he seemed to regain some composure and control. Enough, at least, to question her and the boy, Mickey, about their plans, aspirations, and hopes for the future—as he might have teenagers in Keokuk or Lordsburg. A town friend of Mickey's, the son of a janitor-washroom attendant (who now would be criticized as an Uncle Tom) had been accepted into the Air Force and sent to cooking school. Mickey wanted to try for the same but was afraid of the entrance requirements. Querner's patriotism flared briefly; he told the boy of his own career and assured him the preliminary exam wasn't difficult. "But I can't read real good," the boy complained.

"Well, all you need, really, is to under . . ."

"Here," Toms interrupted, yanking his wallet from his hip pocket and flipping it open. He pulled out a folded slip of paper, a receipt of some kind with a telephone number or address scribbled on the back, and tossed it to the boy. "Go on," he said, looking past Mickey at the dirty curtain hung across the room to divide it into children's bedrooms, "read it."

"Not— . . ." the boy muttered, pointing at the slip, "ah, ree, ah, I don't know this one, then, ah, from, then something writ, something . . . Toms . . . then, dollars, then, you mean these little ones too? A—ash, ack, ah, no, this I can't. I mean. . . ."

The slip dropped from his fingers and floated to the floor. It seemed to take a long time. The boy stared down, seeing nothing, then jerked his head back. He seemed to be suddenly angry at Querner, although Querner had done nothing and said nothing.

"How much school did you go to?" Toms asked.

"Nine grades," the girl, Ina, interposed when Mickey refused to answer.

Toms shook his head. Keltner has accused him of not feeling pity—not as deeply as Querner did—but I think it was a difference of intent, not personality. Toms fought it. Pity would have broken him if he'd given way to it, and it was not his purpose to give way. It was his purpose to educate, to force others to the feelings they brought him.

Sadly, without subterfuge, he began to question Mickey. The boy was angry and tried to cover his embarrassment with belligerence. Again it was directed at Querner, not at Toms, as though the congressman were, in fact, the Inquisitor and Toms his spokesman and deputy.

No, he told them, not every day, he'd gone to school when he could. Yes, weeks, months, he'd been out, maybe he'd gone about half the time. Well, yes, he'd learned to read—most words, that is, just some he couldn't quite get. 'Account?' No, well, he wasn't sure, "like account ta somethin" maybe. 'Receipt?' Well, no, well something . . . well, in stores sometimes when you paid, he guessed that's what it was. Yes, he could add, yes, 26 and 26? well, six and six . . . ten, eleven, twelve? and, what? 26 and 26? and . . . well, on paper he could work it out. "Do you know what separate but equal means?" Mickey shook his head. Maybe it has to do with numbers, he thought, like 26 and 26, well, they were the same, but when you added them.

Ina tried to help and defend him. She showed less antagonism towards Querner; perhaps she thought that he would do something for them if

she impressed him enough. She had only been to school for a couple of years but could read—probably better than Mickey—and had a bright, birdlike perceptiveness.

Toms asked her about marriage. "You're what? seventeen? eighteen?" She'd nodded, she wasn't sure, but seventeen she thought, that's what her mamma had said one time. "What about family? children? What would you want your children to have? The same . . . ?"

She shrugged. "I guess if I marry Mickey, he and me'll get 'em to grow as best they can." She smiled toward Querner. "I got two already," she told him.

"Two?" he repeated, not quite understanding. Possibly he thought she was talking about brothers, or referring with humor toward Mickey and someone else.

"They's not Mickey's," she assured him. "I had 'em before he and me. . . ."

Querner trembled. His hands came up, opened, and he stared at the clean, smooth palms. Ina glanced quickly at Mickey, then away. "Well," she mumbled, "we'se always talked. . . ."

"Sure," Toms said, "my own mother. . . ." He laughed, loudly and artificially, and surveyed the faces. It was almost supper time—Mrs. Mathias had come in from the kitchen with a stack of plates, some of them no more than fragments, and dropped them on a crate by the doorway. "See," he began again, steadily, slowly, "it hurts to tell the truth. If it don't hurt you when you say it. . . ." He glanced at Ina, smiling to reassure her, "it hurts someone else. Don't it, Mister Querner?"

The congressman nodded, answering some inner query rather than Toms's question. Mickey, across the

room, glared with open hostility. "Hurts," Querner repeated, letting his hands drop. He seemed to want very much to be able to transform the white man inside and let him become black. Finally he looked at Ina—forced himself to look at her face, hair, eyes, chin, her neck and breasts and hips, her legs, her feet. *This is a woman . . . he seemed to be saying to himself . . . she has known birth, death, anger, hate. . . .*

Again he trembled, conscious of his audience and embarrassed by their staring. "It's just, just that woman, the one who was afraid of me," he mumbled, "it's just, well, I didn't . . . I mean . . . she could have been. . . ." He looked directly at Ina, smiling an apology ". . . it could have been you."

The girl shrugged, flattening his sentimentality. "They'd've had to kill me," she said without inflection. Querner, looking at her, winced. He knew that had happened too.

The conversation during and after supper avoided, rather than confronted, the issues Toms had brought Querner to face. Soon they made excuses and stepped outside. It was a clear night, though very dark, the moon having set early—one of those nights when the sky seems to be sinking into the earth and one loses sense of proportion.. Keltner doesn't know what they talked about—or if they talked. Querner seems to have been rational (though somewhat introspective) and possibly was thinking in terms of self-help industries and government aid. Toms had a bottle and drank part of it, but Querner, stretched out on the backseat, probably didn't accept an offer to share.

In the morning, after a breakfast of hard biscuits and coffee from a jar

of instant they'd brought with them, they set out along the levee. A harsh north wind was blowing, scattering leaves and picking up eddies of dust. Again, one gets the impression that Toms knew the area quite well and was guiding Querner with a purpose. They saw no whites, no towns, no highways. The only dwellings were shacks. The farm animals were sick and misshapen, the thin-limbed children with their distended bellies looked like they'd been made of tinker-toys.

Querner was an active man, contemporary in the way of successful provincial executives: he could hunt, fish, ski; he'd spent a week exploring the Sangre de Cristos and had gone into the mountains south of the Big Bend where the Mexican Indian tribes lived as they had been living for thousands of years, uninfluenced by great America and her twentieth century.

But this was something different. In Africa, it is said, tribes of primitive Negroes still exist. In that border region of Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, the poor are a residue, a backwash. Instead of thatched huts—the yield of nature—there are tin and wood houses, the discards of civilization. Instead of wild life, dead earth. The people are not nomadic; their successes or starvations are not dependent on the weather and fluctuations of harvest and animal life. They are penned without hope, excluded from the wealth of the nation encompassing them. Querner walked beside Toms, watching, scowling, trying to put together what it meant. Shortly before noon they acquired—"rented"—two mules and alternately walked and rode, lurching from a sack of sandwiches and candy that Toms had packed over his belt. At the edge of scrub hills they stopped

to rest, letting the mules graze while they sat in the sunshine with their backs to the wind.

Toms, head down, was dozing, Querner staring past the levee at the rusted hills thinking, perhaps, of his boyhood. They both heard the thumping of feet against clay but Querner jumped up first. A slender girl with matted hair and wide eyes stumbled around the corner.

"Hi," Querner blurted, almost as surprised as she.

The girl edged back, legs trembling; she obviously wanted to go on running but was afraid of the white man. Toms, now, was awake. Without speaking he went towards her, head cocked.

"You kindda in a hurry, aintcha?"

She nodded, digging at the road. Her eyes, big and almond-shaped, focused on Toms but she seemed to be miles away. Suddenly, without prelude, she began to scream, a piercing staccato babble that Querner found incomprehensible. But Toms's cheeks sucked against his teeth and he peered down the road behind her. "C'mon," he mumbled, going for his mule and lifting the girl onto its rump. "Man's been hurt," he said over his shoulder to Querner.

They found him beside a dirt road, conscious but bleeding from the ears and mouth. It had not been an accident—he'd been beaten. He was a little man, thin, with a large nose and crooked teeth. Toms hoisted him onto the mule in front of the girl—his daughter—and asked her where they could take him.

"He needs a doctor," Querner shouted. Toms nodded. The girl was still shouting and he had to slap her to get her to stop, to listen to what he wanted to ask: "Home!" he barked at her, "which way home?"

She jabbed her finger in the direction she'd been running. Toms swung up behind her on the mule and Querner mounted his. Before they could move away they heard a car's motor and, turning, saw an old Dodge bounce over the rise and speed towards them. A thin spume of dust rose behind its wheels and was whipped away by the wind.

Querner turned his beast into the middle of the road and sat astride it, grimacing. Apparently Toms's first impulse was to flee. He snapped his rope across his old mule's flank and dug his knee into its side but pulled up when he saw that Querner wasn't going to follow.

The mule shied and tried to bolt, but Querner held tight as the car skidded to a stop, "Damn you!" a Southern voice yelled. The driver, a big man with a square slightly flaccid face, opened his door and cocked his head above it. "Them niggers got my mule!" he shouted. "I already give one of 'em a lickin'!"

Querner didn't move. The mule nervous and wasted, tried to edge out of the middle of the road, but Querner held it in position.

"I said git outta the road!"

A face appeared at the opposite window. It was thin, chinless, and its pale eyes were set off by glasses with clear plastic rims. Querner glanced at him, then looked back at the driver, who slammed the door and started forward, hands on his hips.

"Dammit man, what's wrong with you?"

Querner jerked his head as if in pain, then bent forward, squinting, his mouth opening to gasp for air. Out went both feet; his heels struck the mule's flanks and the animal bolted forward, trying to avoid hitting the man in front of the car.

But Querner didn't want to avoid hitting him. He yanked the mule sideways and the frightened beast stumbled and collided with the stranger. Querner lost his balance but held onto the rope as he fell. The mule dragged him a few paces then stopped, pawing the road as his rider scrambled up to him. The driver was slumped against the Dodge's front fender, cursing; the other man had dived back into the car and was groping in the back seat for something.

"Watch out!" Toms called, "he's got a gun!"

Querner slid off, still holding the lead rope, and thrashed through the roadside brush. Somewhere among the brown weeds he found a length of fallen fencepost and clambered onto the mule's back. Again he rode straight for the auto, forcing the threadbare mule into a lame, panic-stricken gallop.

The thin man had the gun out—an old singlebarrel 16-gauge—and was waving it towards Querner. Apparently he hoped to frighten, not slay; at any rate, he didn't shoot and didn't put his eye down to sight. Querner, unabashed, rode past the driver and slashed at him with his weapon, then continued around the front of the car. Toms, still shouting, kicked his mule forward. Despite the injured man in front of him, he reached for Querner's shoulder just as the congressman swung his club back and struck.

The tip of Querner's club caught the thin man just under the eye, spinning his head sideways and dislodging his glasses. The shotgun barrel was almost resting on Querner's shoulder when it went off, point-blank, in Ronald Toms's face. He collapsed backwards, a tangled mass

of bone and blood, and slid off his animal onto the body of the man he'd been trying to carry.

\* \* \* \*

"The experiences of the past day-and-a-half, the strangling poverty in Mustard Heights, and the pathetic stories told him by its inhabitants, had brought Querner's 'mind'—his mental sense of life and justice—to a critical unbalance. Seeing his companion, a man he respected and trusted, lying faceless, unrecognizable, in a valley of blood at his feet, threw him completely into the shadows. From that point on, the Hon. Melvin Querner was no longer sane. . . ."

Such is Keltner's contention. It was the opinion of Querner's congressional colleagues—most of them anyway, although one representative from Louisiana was able to blame the Communists. As far as we can reconstruct the events, however, Querner slid off his mule and picked up the shotgun before going to Toms's side. The lecturer was already dead and the man beneath him was shrieking blindly. The girl had run. Querner knelt beside the body a minute, trembling, his hand clenching and unclenching the hot barrel. Slowly he pushed himself erect, eyeing the driver and the man who had fired and who, now, was standing in front of the car, holding his face and gaping like a grounded fish.

Querner did not panic. He moved deliberately, gesturing with the gun for both white men to get away from the car. The keys were in the ignition; he got in, started the motor, and backed away, turning when he was far enough down the road that they couldn't catch him. A box of shotgun shells were in the back of the car and the club he had swung

at the thin man was beside him on the front seat.

To get to town, Querner had to pass several dozen farms, cross the WPA bridge over a small creek, and turn into main street from the farm road just above two or three blocks of Bluff's "better" houses. He drove all the way through town—two blocks of business places—U-turned and came back. Finally he parked in front of the Farmers' Bank, turned off the engine, and got out of the car carrying the shotgun under one arm and the club in his hand. He did not jump immediately to the sidewalk but proceeded down the street behind diagonally parked cars to the other end of the block. He did this without alarming anyone or attracting attention: a white man carrying a gun down main street of a small Southern town does not draw a comment.

A block from the car he turned. There were half a dozen people at the intersection, including Northway, a sheriff's clerk. Querner looked both ways, frowned, and glanced at the sign above the dime-and-variety store on the corner. Northway stepped towards him, thinking he was from a nearby town and had been in Bluff before.

"Howdy, kin I. . ?"

Querner swung the shotgun to his left hand and pointed it at Northway's chest. The fencepost was in his right hand. He lifted it, then swung it against the dime-and-variety store's plate glass window.

It shattered and a woman screamed. Northway shouted but Querner, now, started methodically on the pedestrians. He caught the sheriff's clerk across the face with the shotgun barrel and strode on, beating everyone on the sidewalk: women, men, children. He shattered

the barbershop window and the glass surrounding its peppermint-striped sign, the hardware store window, the window of the jewelry store. Negroes were not allowed on the sidewalks of main street so he didn't have to look closely: it was whites he was after and he did a good job, scoring two concussions, a broken nose, splintered collarbone, broken elbow, and God-only-knows how many bruises and contusions. Seven people were hospitalized, two of them for over a month. He destroyed eleven plate glass windows and smashed two dozen car headlights, dented fenders and radiators, broke wristwatches and scattered the sundries and cameras of the drugstore's display. He split the lips of a bank clerk who had run to the sidewalk to see what was happening, shattered its big embossed thirty-year-old F-A-R-M-E-R-S' gilding, got into the Dodge, and drove off.

The townspeople were so shocked they couldn't organize a pursuit until Querner was out of sight. At least that's Keltner's story, gleaned after interviews and study of newspaper accounts. But a Memphis reporter mentioned the name of a farmer, the neighbor of the man Querner had taken the shotgun from, and quoted him as saying he had watched from across the street and as soon as "the madman" pulled out, he had jumped in his own car and followed.

Querner, unfamiliar with the countryside, managed to evade the farmer even though the farmer had recognized the car Querner was driving. The "blind fury" he'd been in when he drove into town seems not to have been so blind after all. On the way into town, Querner must have detected a place he could park until the car following sped past—perhaps in a

driveway, a clump of trees, or behind a barn. Again, this does not sound like raving madness. Had the farmer telephoned the police, immediately after recognizing the car, they might have been able to mobilize and corner Querner. But even that is doubtful, for the only law official in town—Northway—was unconscious, and the next nearest deputy was ten or eleven miles away at the time.

Querner left the car a few feet from the place that Ronald Toms's blood had poured onto the ground. The car's owner and his companion, the man Querner had injured, had started on foot to report their auto stolen. They saw Querner returning but were "too far away" to intercept him. By the time the sheriff arrived, Querner and both bodies were gone.

Thus the farmer and his companion became the last persons to acknowledge seeing Querner alive. The sharecropper Querner and Toms had found by the side of the road died within a few months of pneumonia. According to the report sent to the FBI by the local sheriff, the 'colored man's daughter' had roused her family and they'd followed her to the bodies. Both had been carried by mule back to Mustard Heights and the police had been notified from there.

Keltner, caught up in the liberal passions of our decade, our rediscovery of the plight of the South's poor blacks and guided by the skeletons of civil rights workers that have turned up in swamps and in dirt dams, postulates a violent postscript to the story of the Great Emancipator. The farmer, he notes, was heard to brag "wal, I got even all right.... I shore got even. ...." Keltner has this fellow and his friend hide by the roadside, figuring that Quer-

ner had dashed off to notify someone or get aid, and seeing him return alone, they jumped him, killed him, hid the body, and later buried it somewhere on the farm.

It's possible—quite possible. We have no guarantee that Querner would have been particularly watchful when he returned; he might have left the shotgun in the car and while kneeling over Toms's body or that of the injured sharecropper been easy to overpower. Yet . . .

Along that road there is little heavy growth. It was winter and the grass was dry and packed. A straggly barbed-wire fence ran along one side; between it and the road itself the land was flat and weedy. To have approached Querner from the other side, the two assailants would have had to have stumbled down a slope—about twenty-five or thirty yards—from the nearest point of cover. It's unlikely that they could have done so silently. Querner, seeing them, would have tried to defend himself and probably could have gotten to the car for the shotgun before they could have tackled him.

But if he wasn't killed, what happened to Melvin Querner? Keltner insists that "a man in his condition, deranged from his nightmare journey through the harsh evils of Southern Negro life and catapulted into violence and murder" could not have kept himself hidden. Either he would have been caught at further mayhem or, recovering, contact a lawyer and arrange to turn himself in and/or make restitution. "That's what," Keltner adds, "I would do in such circumstances. . . ."

There Keltner's account of the Great Emancipator ends. Gentle, naive, and elected official from a state only fifty years old, Melvin Querner

couldn't cope with the reality of hate and prejudice that lies beneath the structure of the South. He cracked, lashed out against it, and was pushed into an unmarked grave by the man he had attacked for beating a Negro. A touching, rather pathetic story—an American tragedy—that, as Keltner points out, very aptly symbolizes our current dilemma, who and what we are in the world. . . .

Unless Melvin Querner is alive today.

Suppose, just suppose, that Querner was cold stone sober, fully rational, when he picked up that club and shotgun and drove into town. He was naive, yes, but on the other hand very worldly; he'd spent ten years in the military, had started a fringe business and built it into a thriving industry. He was a fine shot, he'd killed deer, mountain lions, bear, big-horn sheep; he could ride horseback and had made long exploring trips through country that's virtually closed off from the world. He was pragmatic. He was intelligent. He was from the West—the old West; the ruins of Fort Sumner, where Billy the Kid bled his last, was part of his constituency.

Keltner is right about one thing: Querner had been deeply affected by his visit to Mustard Heights. Ronald Toms had seen to that. He'd drawn the worst out of the people and forced it into daylight. Like them, Querner had faced the truth and had realized—he must have realized—how helpless he was to do anything about it, even as a congressman. Picture him kneeling beside Toms's body. Keltner has the separation from sanity occurring then. But what if, instead of flipping, Querner's mind was coolly assessing facts? The Negro had been accused of stealing a

mule, Toms had rushed in to help, the gun had been fired in self-defense. One man—and possibly another—were dying, yet no one would be called to justice. No one would be called to justice for the rape of the woman in Mustard Heights. For Mickey Mathias's ninth-grade illiteracy. Unless. . . .

Like I said, Melvin Querner was a rational man. He could have gone anywhere, altered his name, and become successful again. He knew that. And he knew that the town and everyone in it would be the reason the farmers weren't punished. Toms, a new friend, nevertheless had been a friend, Querner owed him something. No Negro in Mustard Heights could pick up a club and draw payment—the whole community would have been put to the torch and the knife.

So Querner stood up, gestured with the shotgun, tossed his club on the front seat, and drove into town. He knew he would have to work fast—take them by surprise, exact his punishment, and leave. Why the town? Why not the farmer and man who'd accidentally fired the gun that had killed Toms? I don't know, except that that merely would have been vengeance, not punishment. Besides, Toms and the other Negro had died because they were innocent (or guilty only of being black). Thus innocents had to pay.

Querner parked the car and quietly walked the length of the street, then worked his way back from the dime store to the bank. Instead of blind rage, he may have struck with enjoyment. Satisfaction. *'This is for Toms, this for the woman, this . . . for me!'* He evaded pursuit, returned to Toms's body, and perhaps he even helped get it to Mustard Heights. The

black people there knew him, they would have helped him. The car he and Toms had driven to Mustard Heights was never found. Perhaps he rode north in it with Ina and Mickey, with old Mathias, with a friend of a friend of a friend. Only Keltner and the McBeaths knew that Querner had gone south with Toms and could have identified him as the berserk avenger; several days passed before they found out about Toms's death and went to the police. McBeath flew south over the weekend—Querner may have been hiding and could have come north with him. Mrs. Querner left Washington and as far as anyone knows has disappeared. Possibly she's remarried . . . to a man named Jones or Olson who very much resembles her missing spouse? Right now they

may be sitting in their living-room, peering at a newscast showing black militants with upraised fists. Ina's children would be nineteen or twenty now—is that him with the sallow angry face? the bignose and hair roused up mock-African? Is that the boy the Mathiases adopted? the girl who found her father's beaten body, saw Toms's face and neck ripped away by a shotgun blast? Perhaps, in that living-room, Melvin Querner remembers his day in a Southern town, feels his muscles react to the strong free success of contact and revenge. Perhaps in spirit there he is again, shouting 'this is for Toms . . . for the woman . . . for me!' Perhaps he's hoping that they win, whatever the price.

Or is that too much to ask?

## The Trying Tree

• Thomas Kretz, S.J.

Back from Spain.  
Fluency is expected. Should  
I prepare and pretend?  
Keep to the script? Would  
the masks fall before  
memory leaving a midnight blush?  
Perhaps a rush  
of nakedness: I  
don't know the damn language.

The worst is over.  
Stumbling is expected. All  
afternoon ignoring the open  
book, staring down  
a little tree trying  
to blossom. Leaves plead  
for time, rhyme, and reason.

Each in its season.  
Spring in Osorno and  
easy conversation.

# Adventures in Moving

• Claude Koch

Neither trucks nor cars moved. Joe Yosemite made it clear over WPJU ("Travelers' Alert. Y'all hear Y'all hear Y'all hear"), interrupting the frenetic rhythms with his prophesy of a silent world. The snow was up to ten inches and Chris Wintergarten could feel it falling, could hear it falling. He knew the quality of the noise Joe Yosemite presided over from its vibrations—it filtered through to him as a brouhaha at a great distance; and Joe Yosemite's acrobatic voice was only a confidential whisper in the room. But the snow, and the street he looked down on from his second story front, sighed with an unforgettable sound.

He dialed Joe Yosemite out—and all hope of those cheerful rhetorical questions concerning health and the state of the nation that, in Big Joe's South Philadelphia voice, did him for a good deal of his communication with the world. No trucks today, but across the street and a floor below, serrated by sycamore branches weighted with snow, parked the rented *U-Haul* truck that had pulled up in the night. *U-Haul—Adventure in Moving*. The lettering was in black on its orange side. Chris could see that well enough, though ninety years of snow had moistened his eyes so that all things slid. It was a shame about the trucks generally; his mind journeyed with them on the suburban street. Just a week ago, Smathers Oil (*Commercial and Home Deliveries*) had gotten to be a water-

wagon and taken him down a street cobbled with paving blocks, brought over as ballast in ships from the old country in his grandfather's time. And the kids in overalls and pin-afores were dancing in its spray, dancing in its spray, dancing in its spray. . . . Or the time before last when six horses pulled a calliope over the same cobblestones—until he worked himself to the window and saw it was a billboard on a flat, and a loud speaker, informing of the new gas station at a corner beyond his vision. He could see well (it was the carrots of his youth that did that), but hardly around corners and through wainscoting. He wasn't a ghost yet.

Then the young fellow came out in his galoshes across the way and got into the truck and got out again. *U-Haul—Adventure in Moving* wasn't going anywhere. Joe Yosemite had said so. The young fellow waved up to him; and thanks to the carrots, Chris could read his lips: "Hy, Pop, how're you!" Chris waved back: "Fine," he moved his own lips with exaggeration. "Just fine!" Then, as he always did, remembering how lonely Laura could be, he called her up behind him at the window to see.

Thirty years ago, when Chris had first heard "Pop," it snowed. He lurched on the wet sill of the trolley, and another young fellow, with just about the same civilized indifference, muttered from behind the throttle, "Watch it, Pop. . . ."

That made him angry, and the anger smoldered all day in the bland niche where he kept the accounts for Batten and Lunger ("Hit and Spit," they were called). Time, apparently, was one thing he'd not kept proper account of, so he'd been found out at sixty. He came home, stamping through the resonant, unheated enclosed porch, ostensibly to get the snow off his galoshes—but he knew better. And Laura said: "What is it, Chris? Are you all right?" So he sulked. He'd learned early, even before he'd packed the family off from Pennsylvania to Vermont, that she was the only one he could hurt, because she was the only one who gave a damn.

"What is it, Chris?" she said behind him now. She was always behind him.

"They're moving," he said. "What's-his-name, across the street." He pounded the arm of the chair he might as well have been anchored to, though the thud of his palm was only a wave in time. "Where're they going? Isn't it good enough for them here?" A grackle unchucked itself on the laden branch just beyond the window, shook the snow from its head, and wiggled right down to its tail-feathers. The yellow beak opened in protest, and Chris, from long watching, could read what it said: "No luck today; nothing to do but hold out, hold out, hold out. . ." Everyone knew that.

He felt her hand on his shoulder; and if he turned, he'd see how slight it was, pinched and rough from things no one on God's earth would plan. That was something he knew before the young fellow'd made his flip remark.

"Come on, Chris," she said. "Come

to bed and sleep. Things will be better in the morning."

"Hold it. Wait a while," he said. There was always time to sleep. Anytime he could settle himself with his toes in the arch of her little feet, and his hand cupped in hers where she bent it over her shoulder; or she'd press against his back, fitting as though to complete once and for all the puzzle of the world. Then he could travel too, like with the trucks.

The young fellow'd gone to the back of the truck and swung open the door. By God, was he going to do it? In spite of WPJU and Joe Yosemite—was he going to move himself against all the forces of God and man? Chris tapped on the window and the grackle flew away.

"Laura, come over here, Laura." He crooked two fingers over his shoulder. He felt the steps behind him.

To move himself—make the decision and go, like when he'd quit at "Hit and Spit" and packed Laura and Fran and Peter off to Vermont for that disastrous year. The only mighty move he'd ever made, and the wrong one. Then back to "Hit and Spit" with seniority gone. Yet there had been that one moment—though Laura had had misgivings—that one moment when the decision was made and something else seemed to be opening like the sky that spread out all at once above those rocky acres in Vermont. He saw it still in the eyes of all those who had news of the world: the boy with the morning paper, and the mailman, and even the priest who came once a month at a certain hour and for whom he manufactured atrocious sins to make his time worth while. Last month he'd said he'd enrolled his cat in the Audubon Society—it was the most

outrageous thing he could imagine—though he had no cat, no cat, no cat . . .

The fingers on his shoulder were insistent. He shifted about.

"Milk, Dad." He could read his daughter's lips. They were cracked and small, older than Laura's in Vermont.

"Where's Mom?" he asked. But he could see she didn't hear. She thrust the glass insistently upon him, and because it was too much trouble to refuse, he took it. Her eyes squinted at the window toward which he pushed a finger.

"That young fellow's going in this weather. You can't move a family hardly ever—not in this weather anyways."

She bent down. "What, Dad? Are you comfortable?" She settled the comfort closer about his legs. Her hands were large, like his own, larger than a woman's should be, larger than Laura's. Once he and Laura had smiled at them, her hands and her eyes alive in the cradle. The eyes had receded somehow. When she went away, Laura would come.

"Go away, Fran," he said. Not because he didn't love her, but she couldn't hear him properly; and without a doubt he had to tell someone that the young fellow across the way mustn't go this day, mustn't chance it in the storm. Then she was gone. He felt the floorboards give beneath his feet as she moved away back down into the house that he knew like the palm of his hand, and that the palm of his hand hadn't touched since it'd curled and gone hard during one of the times he'd been dreaming. No sounds drifted up from down there, though people went in and out he hardly recognized: children vaguely familiar, others.

Then Laura leaned over him, and he could talk again.

"We've got to get some sense in his head. They'll get sick like you did in the snow."

"It was worth it, Chris. Maybe they'll make out." The fingers brushed across his forehead, but he shook his head.

"Can't let him. Can't let him. Can't let him."

"If you say so. . . ." She always agreed with him now.

A cinder swept across his eye; the crackle was back in the sycamore again, close in to the trunk. A snowplow passed, cranking along to the chime of chains. Chris leaned forward, listening—but the metal rang back in his head and came from light years away, somewhere in Vermont with the drifts to the window and the two young faces pressed to the pane. He went in and out with ease, the pain only in his heart, booted and muffled to the eyes. *Laura, Laura, Laura . . .* her lovely name swelled in his throat until there was no room for breath. While he died, denied of air, the blinds went down and the lights went out; and he looked back through the window of the Calais Stage, with Fran and Peter, at her last house. Was it really true that a man could be condemned once only? Hadn't he paid with his life?

"What is it, Chris? Are you all right?"

"They're moving," he said. "What's-his-name. . . ."

The door across the way banged open to common, unforgettable sounds, and two children jostled out, red and blue scarves twisted and outflung. Then the young woman came, carrying an iron. When had the truck been loaded? It was a quarter

ton. How could they survive the winter with so little? They weren't yet out and the sign was up, nailed to the cross bars of the porch railing: *Furnished Apartment For Rent.*

Something to do. He stretched out his good hand and clicked on the radio. With the knob turned to full, Joe Yosemite's voice whispered, but the vibrations were strong. It was almost too late. The young fellow was coming down the steps, hauling a hamper. Chris tapped at the window again, but only its shattering might warn him against what he was to do. Chris's hand trembled at the milk glass.

"Joe'll tell him, Laura. Let Joe tell him about the danger."

She didn't answer. This time the glass was too heavy to lift. He tried to turn it, but there was a pressure on his wrist. He called to her in the unsteady silence: "Come around, Laura. Help me, help me, help me. . . ."

She did.

When his daughter climbed the stairs, wringing her hands at the

noise, Joe Yosemite was announcing the disheartening weather with his strident and unspeakable cheer. "All movement's at a stop," he said. "What y'all think of that? So stay where y're, y'hear? And keep warm, keep warm, keep warm. . . ."

The news neither surprised nor greatly displeased her. She stood cautiously and comprehended a reasonable awe: Chris had withdrawn from the world as unobtrusively as a familiar person from a noisy party, out the back door.

The car door slammed. It went away, yellow and black, to stall in a drift a block away. The grackle shook and complained though no one heard. Fran switched off the radio in the middle of Joe Yosemite's prophesy. She closed the door against the life below and spread a cover. Should she move him or not? There was no one to ask. The old man's feet, dislodged from his slippers and thrust beyond the cover, were suitably scarred, as perhaps is natural when the wings are sheared from the heels of the children of time.

## On the Other Hand

• Biron Walker

Temper the wind?

Not if the shepherd would provoke  
or sheep provide  
a readier, tighter fleece.

# George Ade, Realist, Fabulist

• Louis Hasley

When George Ade went to Chicago in 1890, that maelstrom of a million people cried out for the pen of a Balzac. No Balzac answered the cry, and perhaps if Balzac had been there his pen would have proved inadequate. For the city was so sprawling, so disorganized, and so corrupt in its phenomenal growth, with its mid-American values rapidly eroding under a rampant materialism, that only some never-to-be inland Melville could have challenged its turbulent spirit. Perhaps only a quietly determined piecemeal effort could make even a promising beginning.

It was a place and a time for realism and satire. Chicago was already the City of the Big Shoulders, as Carl Sandburg was to describe it in 1916, where painted women under the gas lamps lured the farm boys. It was also, as George Ade wrote in 1899, "a city made up of country people." And looking back from 1931, Ade wrote in *The Old-Time Saloon*:

The Chicago of the nineties had nothing to learn from Port Said, Singapore, the lake front at Buffalo, or the crib section of New Orleans—the aforesaid spots having a world-wide reputation for wild wickedness. Chicago was just as tough as it knew how to be, and that's as much as you can ask of any town. Saloons everywhere and many of them open all night and all day Sunday. . . .

A blaring and glaring and insolent red-light district held day and night revelry on the very rim of the most highly respectable business section. Everything went, from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter.

There were nights when John T. McCutcheon and Ade, returning to their rooming house, walked down the middle of the street to avoid the chance of a thug leaping out from a dark alley to rob them.

Chicago, then, was challenge more than enough when George Ade undertook his assignments on the *Chicago Record*, nibbling away, sometimes reportorially, sometimes creatively, at the teeming variety of life around him. Three years later, in 1893, Finley Peter Dunne created his memorable saloon-keeper, Mr. Dooley, placing him behind a Chicago bar to dialog with his friend Hennessy about wars and wickedness, about peace, people, and politics. In the same year Ade was given his own department in the *Record*, "Stories of the Streets and the Town." Among these unsigned, essay-length pieces are many that must rank with the best journalistic, descriptive, documentary writing of the day, with their coolly observed detail, their deft imaginative touches, and the tight rein of their occasional humor. Other pieces are fictional, vivid with characters sounding the silver ring of the true-minted coin and speaking the colorful, often racy or half-educated vernacular

of the countryside as smartened by the vitality of the city. Among these pieces also are scattered the first of Ade's many fables in slang, the genre which has been, and continues to be, the backbone of his reputation as a literary humorist, despite his triumphant career as a writer of comedies that made him the most successful American playwright of the first decade of this century. In his newspaper department he gave us both realistic pieces and satirical pieces, sometimes separate and pure, sometimes mixed. The variety of this work is indicated in the words of Lee Coyle in his excellent critical study, *George Ade*:

He wrote social history, burlesque, satire, fables, parodies, dialogues, sketches, tales, short stories, verses, and episodes in the lives of several recurring characters.

George Ade's career exemplifies particularly well the coming of age of America. He was born in 1866, the year after Appomattox, a time when America was still predominantly rural. The place was the small northwest Indiana town of Kentland. But the boy never took a liking to farm work, which was what the rural community principally offered. Blessed with an amiable father who didn't know what to do with him, he was allowed to attend Indiana's recently founded agricultural and engineering institution, Purdue, where he developed literary tastes and a consuming interest in the frequent dramatic productions offered in the adjacent city of Lafayette. "Let no reader suppose," writes his biographer Fred C. Kelly, "that George Ade ever permitted his class work to distract him from his studies of the drama." At the graduation exercises in June, 1887, each of the eight graduates gave an oration. Ade's oration was modestly entitled "The Future of Letters in the West."

Ade's lifelong closest friend, sometime roommate, illustrator, and famed cartoonist, John T. McCutcheon, has written of the equipment for writing which Ade brought with him to Chicago: the experiences of seventeen years in an entirely rural community, four literary and liberating college years, and three years of mostly newspaper work in the medium-sized city of Lafayette. His picture book memory thronged with the people and scenes he had met along the way. Now, in company with McCutcheon on the big-city *Chicago Record*, he reached out for new adventures with a lively zest for the daily encounters in and around the Loop, along the busy river and the lake front, in the bars, the newspaper offices, the train stations, the restaurants, and the theatres.

Chekhov remarks in his notebooks that the best men leave the villages for the towns. In the Midwest and throughout the country, it was a general process of urbanization that continued as a vital fact all during Ade's boyhood and manhood up to the depression thirties, continuing even to the present day. Ade saw and uniquely depicted the variety of ex-country people awkwardly, often brashly, and still more often naively enjoying the freedom, independence, mobility, social life, and income offered by the city.

The earliest significant creation of Ade's is young Artie Blanchard, whose principal concern is not his minor office job but his girl Mamie. Artie is a master of brittle, slangy, exuberant, self-confident speech:

"Why, out there last night I saw the measliest lot of jays, regular Charley-boys, floatin' around with queens. I wish somebody'd tell me how they cop 'em out. Don't it kill you dead to see a swell girl, you know, a regular peach, holdin' on to some freak with side whiskers and thinkin' she's got a good thing? That's right. She thinks he's all right. Any-way, she acts the part, but you can't tell, because them fly girls know how to make a good many bluff plays."

By combining a sequence of episodes in the life and love adventures of this young man, Ade produced, in 1896, his first book, usually called a novel, *Artie*. It is a jaunty, cocky, comedic portrait, done in colorful idiom and slang, most of which still carries a resonant zing.

Two books of similar structure—episodic portraits—followed: *Pink Marsh* (1897) and *Doc' Horne* (1899). *Pink Marsh* has been widely celebrated as the first book to portray authentically the speech and character of the Northern Negro. William Dean Howells, the leading American critic in the nineties, gave it warm praise. Mark Twain, writing to Howells, labeled Pink a "shiftless, worthless, lovable black darling. . . . He deserves to live forever." *Pink Marsh*, an overtly engaging colored shoe-shine 'boy,' knows how to butter his customers with warm-hearted naive, wondering Negro talk. His most faithful client, the unnamed Morning Customer, is a lawyer who talks to an admiring Pink with amiable pomposity and who writes pretentious letters on three occasions to get Pink out of trouble. Against the rivals from his own race, Pink himself rises to inspired threats that are a not distant kin to such frontier ritual brags as those of Davy Crockett and Mike Fink.

"I'm goin' 'o leave 'nough o' him to make a good funeral, at' 'at's 'bout all."

"I'm goin' 'o cut my name in 'at cullud rascal so deep 'at you can read it f'om behind same as in front."

"Yes, seh, misteh, 'ey'll be a fun'eal on Ahmoh Av'nue, an' ol' Gawge Lippincott won't heah no music."

Today, Ade's portrait of Pink as a rather shiftless, superstitious, heavy-drinking, numbers-playing, knife-wielding, chicken-stealing, crapshooting colored man in remote post-Civil War days seems both strained and stereotyped, but his contemporary critics considered it authentic. Of the injustices and inferior status the Negro was subjected to, Ade was aware. His "Fable of the Ex-Chattel and the Awful Swat That Was Waiting for the Colonel" is an ironical and humorous sketch of a Southern colonel whom a colored head waiter treats as an equal up North and who, in retaliation, causes a colored porter to leap from his train to escape with his life as they cross the Ohio River into the Southland. *Pink Marsh* quotes a colored occupant of a jail cell as saying: "We got mo' rights 'an anybody, but it sutny ain't safe to use 'em." Ade's stand-in, the Morning Customer, however, has a discernibly patronizing tone in his barber shop talks with Pink.

Here it may be said that Ade's attitude toward social problems such as crime and economic injustices was lightly satirical and tolerant, as it was toward everything else. In one of his sketches he observes that "a man may

have a grasp for money and still be tender-hearted, as witness the well-known philanthropists." Ade was a kind and generous person to a fault, and it is small derogation to say that he was not a crusader for social causes.

In *Doc' Horne* we are given a cluster of realistic and amusing portraits hung on a thin string of complication. These characters are the somewhat fly-specked residents of a small-time Chicago hostelry, the Alfalfa European Hotel. Here lives sixtyish Doc' Horne, holder of a minor desk job in a federal office, together with his fellow lodgers, the bicycle salesman, the lush, the lightning dentist, the book-agent, the actor, the freckled boy, the hustler, and the race track man. Doc' Horne himself is the gravity center and oracle of the group. Formal in manner, soberly dignified, he speaks tediously in lengthy, low-keyed sentences. No incident related by the other characters is so unusual or so remarkable as not to be immediately capped by Doc' in another story that judicially and with elaborate circumstantiality reflects his own heroism or phenomenal resourcefulness. On internal evidence alone, this book would seem to owe something, perhaps much, to Oliver Wendell Holmes's breakfast table series, allowing for the Adean narrative realism and satire in place of the beaming Holmesian wit.

Ade's "Stories of the Streets and of the Town" ran in the Chicago *Record* for seven years, 1893-1900. During the entire decade of the nineties, Ade was given numerous special assignments interviewing celebrities such as Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll and reporting important events like the Sullivan-Corbett fight. In September of 1897 he stumbled onto the concise, epigrammatic, satirical genre, fables in slang, with a sketch later entitled "The Fable of Sister Mae Who Did As Well As Could Be Expected." The fable form as practiced by Ade has strong similarities to the generalized Elizabethan 'character,' except that Ade has supplied a verve and a sprightliness missing from the earlier genre. His capitalization of prominent words in a sentence is a device effective for giving them an air of satirical, special, sometimes esoteric humorous meaning. It is distinctly Adean, a nonce thing; anyone else using it would be simply an imitator. As for the 'morals' that Ade subjoins, they are far from Aesopian; they furnish a sophisticated wit that is sometimes didactic but often merely flippant. His first of many collections of these vignettes, *Fables in Slang*, appeared in 1900. Flourishingly successful, it sold over 70,000 copies in the first year. William Allen White, the editor and novelist, wrote to Ade: "I would rather have written *Fables in Slang* than be president." Ade's books of fables sold in the millions down to his last collection, called *Hand-Made Fables*, which appeared in 1920.

If *Artie*, *Pink Marsh*, and *Doc' Horne* gave only incidental attention to the distaff side, the fables and other stories soon helped to redress the imbalance. Sister Mae, who was "short on Intellect but long on Shape," married wealth and magnanimously gave her sister Luella a job as assistant cook at five dollars a week. Sister Mae is gloriously succeeded by a comprehensive directory of adroit, designing, captivating, social-climbing females that can delight the most exacting taste. There is the Slim Girl who dreamed of the Ideal, a literary man who "would enfold Her in his Arms and whisper Emerson's Essays to her"; at 34, she finally marries an overpaid janitor who makes twenty-three a month. There is the outsize Good Fairy with a Lorgnette

who in the morning "looked like a Street just before they put on the Asphalt"; this condescending do-gooder went about among the poor being benevolent and reminding them that "it is no Disgrace to be Poor; it is simply Inconvenient, that's all." And there was the Grass Widow who charmed numerous desk men into buying a seven-pound copy of *Happy Hours With the Poets* at six dollars a copy. As she approached the Business Manager,

The Cold Chills went down his Spine when he caught a Flash of the Half-Morocco Prospectus. If it had been a Man Agent he would have shouted 'Sick 'em' and reached for a Paper-Weight. But when the Agent had the Venus de Milo beaten on Points and Style, and . . . she is Coy and introduces the Startled Fawn way of backing up without getting any further away, and when she comes on with Short Steps, and he gets the remote Swish of the Real Silk, to say nothing of the Faint Aroma of New Mown Hay, and her Hesitating Manner seems to ask, "Have I or have I not met a Friend?"—in a Case of that kind, the Victim is just the same as Strapped to the Operating Table.

Innumerable other female portraits could merit a place in any Adean gallery. There is Lutie, the False Alarm who wanted to be a singer.

When Lutie was eighteen, her mother said they ought to do something with Lutie's Voice. The Neighbors thought so too. Some recommended killing the Nerve, while others allowed it ought to be Pulled.

Mrs. Jump, in another fable, finds a reason every spring for moving to a different house. In another, a woman whose husband was stuck on Plain Living and Home Comforts "never let up until she had made the whole House thoroughly Artistic."

For a man who never married, the number of his fables, essays, and stories that deal sure-handedly with marital, intra-family, and heterosexual situations is amazing. Sexual matters as such, however, he shunned; everything was to be suitable for Mother and the Girls. Ultimately his focus is on character, and the characters are generalized. But the choice of telltale traits is so deft, so shrewd, a certain depth is so quickly reached that the casual reader, merely amused, may fail to experience the insights and the understanding of people that these cameo pieces embody. Some of the titles of Ade's volumes accurately if simply reflect his material and hint at his approach: *Fables in Slang*, *The Girl Proposition*, *Breaking Into Society*, *True Bills*, *People You Know*, *Knocking the Neighbors*. And the lengthy titles of the two-to-ten-page pieces that make up these volumes frequently amount to a summary of what they contain.

In the fictional pieces that we have been considering, complication is negligible and plot is non-existent even in the so-called novels, already mentioned. Like other humorists—Chaucer, Cervantes, Twain, Lardner, Thurber—Ade at his best deals only in episodic structures, and that means essentially short lengths. (Thurber tackled the novel form once and gave up "forever"

after 5000 words.) Not for Ade, nor for the other humorists, was the extended, carefully interwoven organic plot. For the limitation of length seems to be endemic to the creation of humor and, the epic poet apart, parallels the poet's necessity to please moment by moment, continuously, never postponing the reader's immediate gratification for the withheld cumulative effect. Such long and diverse books as *Don Quixote* and Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* live by the smaller episodes that are only incidentally dependent on the overall plan. It is noticeable that in Ade's later fables, which tend to be longer than the early ones, the method of pyrotechnic diction sustains less well, evidently because, having less to say than formerly, he was beguiled into thinning and stretching his material.

Income from Ade's books before he took up the drama gave him affluence; income from his plays and musical comedies in the first years of the new century made him rich. It is the popularity and financial success of his theatrical ventures that are fittingly first remarked rather than their degree of literary or dramatic excellence. And while no reassessment of American drama is likely to make out its real arrival to be pre-O'Neill, it would nevertheless be false to assert that Ade's plays are without competence and interest. *The College Widow* is the archetype of a whole host of love-and-athletic comedies, both good and bad, much as Owen Wister's *The Virginian* is the ancestor of a long line of westerns. In *The College Widow* Ade has managed a well-sustained organic plot with lively quips and tumultuous action, though its 'collegiate' exuberance strikes a sensitive ear today as verging on the adolescent.

*The County Chairman* is a play of solider substance. It mixes love and politics at the level of reasonably serious comedy, has a plausible and well-constructed plot, and while there are no real issues, interest is generated in the personalities, the political maneuverings, and scattered comic elements. In a not too dissimilar vein is a tightly woven one-act play of continuing reader interest, "The Mayor and the Manicure," involving a flashy manicure girl who tries to shake down the mayor by threatening to sue his college son for breach of promise. The play produces both the tension of important matters at stake and rewarding comic coruscations along the line of tension.

Ade's musical comedies (*The Sultan of Sulu*, *The Old Town*, *The Fair Co-ed*, *The Sho-Gun*, *Peggy From Paris*) have only a period interest. Of course neither the plays nor the musical comedies are produced today, and they are no longer in print. In reading the musical comedies, one is reminded (to Ade's disadvantage) of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas that preceded Ade's career by several decades. In a thin volume accurately entitled *Verses and Jingles*, Ade published thirty-eight lyrics, most of which were reprinted from his above-mentioned musical comedies, while a few had found no previous cover. The majority are quite ordinary as light verse, a few are pale and poor, and several have brilliant lines that by exception show that Ade's poetry is at its best (and that best is very good) in his prose. The problem is to find poems that do not merely have some good lines but that are good all the way through. Two of them may be remarked as fully satisfying. "The Microbe's Serenade" can stand high in any company of humorous verse;

and his burlesque of grand opera, "Il Janitor," is priceless. But the overall experience of his humorous verse is disappointing.

Much in the vein of musical comedy is Ade's frothy satirical novel, *The Slim Princess* (1907). Ade had encouraged George Barr McCutcheon, brother of the cartoonist, to publish *Graustark* (1901), the novel that led to a parade of romances about tiny principalities, their kings, queens, and princesses. Today a satire of the Graustarkian genre would be beating a dead horse; and thus Ade's satire about a princess of Morovenia who is too slim for her countrymen's taste to win a husband but who captures the heart of a rich and dashing American tourist, gets separated from him, and finally finds and wins him is thin fare.

The most important result of Ade's superabundant royalties was their effect on his life. He was not interested in *belles lettres*, perhaps not even interested in literature. Loving travel and the good life, he twice went around the world, made ten trips to Europe, and usually wintered in Florida the twenty-five years preceding his death in 1944. He was fortunate in his investments. He early bought up more than two thousand acres of land near his birthplace, and on it he erected, in 1904, a luxurious Tudor mansion which he named Hazelden and which was his residence until his final illness a few months before his death. At this rural retreat, complete with golf course, he lived for forty years in unusual splendor, entertaining scores of celebrities from many fields but also staging a gigantic annual Kids' Picnic. A post-World War I homecoming party which he hosted at Hazelden for service men and their families on July 4, 1919 was attended by 15,000 people.

The last sustained writing done by this cosmopolitan country gentleman is one of his soundest books, *The Old-Time Saloon* (1931). It was called by biographer Kelly "one of the most amusing books he ever wrote." Certainly it is one of his best, but it is only incidentally amusing; the pleasure it gives lies in its nostalgia, its warmth, its evocation of the old-time saloon as one of the most colorful aspects of the world before Prohibition. Even though Ade was personally a foe of Prohibition, his book makes no plea; his purpose was "to dish up history instead of attempting to influence legislation." He saw the saloon's numerous evils with a clear eye, and he saw the saloon also as an oasis of companionship and entertainment in the years before radio, fast transportation, talking pictures, and television.

George Ade's parents were of British ancestry, his father having been born in England. Both parents were church-going people, his father a Baptist, afterward a Campbellite, his mother a Methodist. While Ade gave up church attendance when still young, Kelly quotes him as saying:

"I do think the church is necessary in modern life because people cannot get comforts and consolation and the promises for the future by scientific research or a study of the philosophies. Our churches inspire faith and emotions which are useful to the well-being of the world. . . ."

Kelly adds that "he had no faith in a better life beyond." One can say that his religion was kindness, for there is a kind-hearted though often impudent moralism at the core of his satires. His friend Booth Tarkington called him

"helplessly generous" to many persons and causes. In his essay "The Yankee's Prayer," he wrote: "Help me to believe that the man prospers best and longest who is concerned as to the welfare of the people about him."

But we are principally interested in what values his best writings, the fables, along with some of his realistic sketches, reveal. "For though the fables danced lightly on the surface of life," wrote Lee Coyle in *George Ade*, "Ade's schottische revealed deeper layers of existence, too: the loneliness of the farm, the destruction of the village, the emptiness of the city, the inadequacy of traditional values, the tedium of life without laughter, the lust for status and culture, the national distrust of ideas and acceptance of prosperity as an ultimate value."

George Ade has made a permanent mark on the American language. Among other less noticeable results he has previsioned O. Henry and Ring Lardner, and there are glimpses of Sinclair Lewis's Babbitt. Thurber's fables surely owe a considerable debt to Ade. To place him in American literature, therefore, we must look particularly at his unique language. For no one else has used such a richly humorous vernacular that is so revelatory of character and that has lost so little through the too-often perishable commodity of slang. Slang is here, yes, but much of what superficially passes for slang is really something else, a metaphorical, living, poetic vernacular.

In *Green Hills of Africa*, Hemingway makes the famous pronouncement that "all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*." If we can use *Huck* as the first great monument of vernacular American literature, we may go on to indicate a line of descent by pairing Stephen Crane and George Ade in the nineties as together constituting the next step in its evolution. One more step would take us to Ring Lardner. And one last step would bring us to J. D. Salinger. These are the most seminal users of the American language since *Huck's* appearance in 1885, even though there are many others who have made their smaller but not negligible contributions.

## A Gospel Loudspeaker

• Paul Ramsey

Do you think your roaring  
Will bring us peace?

# A Glance Back

• Michael Koch

## I

There was the stark clear sun of early spring and the wind high in the greening skeleton trees, when nurses, bulging from glaring white uniforms, brought children to play in the mall. And derelicts, smelling the spring on the soft wind, opened their old, oversized coats and stood like heaped clothes-trees in public terraces.

There was the light of spring shining through the structure of bushes into the busy corners of the mall, where children kicked dusty rags of newspapers and crunched brown, crisp leaves.

All, everything, was moving. From the edge of vision (a reflecting skyscraper mounting behind a stream of brownstones past a green pedestaled statue, across a car-threaded circle) to the assigned terraces of the mall, a restless concentrate of life broke from each person to master the moment, and each moment became part of the All—everything moved.

I thought I saw Carson here once. Perhaps it was a year ago; yes, a year ago. There was a tall man, not different from the derelicts except for a stick he carried in his right hand. He was walking away from where I stood and I could just see his back. It was Carson's back. He was using the stick to poke into things—the bushes, big stone pots of ivy, the new turned earth where the city would put red tulips. He did not stop but slid, almost softly it looked, into each of the rhythmic pokes of his stick. I

had not the strength to chase after him. Though I walked down two flights of steps to his level, before I was aware of lacking.

It's a weakness truth, a man's. It is variable—unwanted, sought, loved, hated, soft, hard, anything, everything, but always there, always man's. You stand on a mountain and all below is patched, square and rectangle, or clustered, circle and coterie, or lined. To your right are squares of green, to the left, rectangles of gold, in the center a cluster of emerald brown strung on a line of blue. And all this is truth. But you walk down the mountain to find fields of cabbages to your right, rectangle-fenced corn to the left, and at your feet, a river running out of a forest. And this must be truth too. Closer: veined worm-tunneled cabbage, kerneled silkbound corn, leafed tree and rocked river; each step changes truth.

So I had not strength to follow Carson. He may have found something different, a new truth that I would have to handle.

I recall Carson the same way I remember the skyline of a city. I'm aware of the mass of the skyline, where it begins and ends, how it looks in the sun from a distance, how it glows dully on a hazy night. But what I remember, what combs the mass into a shape for memory, are certain buildings. One is tall and straight, another is rectangle, glows with many windows in the sun; still

another is set against a gap of blue sky. Each bit of skyline has a building which the city spreads about.

\*

I had known Carson since I was a freshman in college. In junior year, when the full strength of my major put me often in contact with him, I became his friend. Most vivid is the end of senior year and him.

I found Carson one day among the debris of the end of the term, sitting very straight with his elbows on the arms of his swivel chair. In his lap was a brown vase which he turned very slowly with the tips of his fingers. He looked like a sad weathered statue surrounded by pillars of overdue library books and fat brown cardboard boxes. I knocked on the doorjamb. He looked up and motioned me into a plastic covered sofa inside the door.

He was rawboned and tall. All of his height was in his legs, causing his knees to be unnaturally high, especially when he sat with something in his lap. He wore a bulky gray suit which fit wrong in all the proper places. Sitting caused the ample cuffs of his trousers to rise half-way between his knees and ankles; pale and smooth was the flesh of his legs. He had on together two pairs of dark socks, the outer frayed where they entered the heels of highly polished smooth black shoes.

From out the suit coat and blue sweater rose a rippling white collar, sure thick neck, strong narrow face. He had very black hair generally parted to the right. The eyes were green, hazel, in his squinting of interest pressed to liquid, to brightness. There were fine webbing lines in the corners of his eyes, artist's eyes,

squinting at subjects through the dusks of many years.

"Do you know"—he moved his fingers over the raised forms at the base of the vase—"that will exist longer than me? It's not worth ten dollars, but it will stay in this form, in this whole, until judgment is passed upon it by a little boy, or a climbing cat, or some clumsy housewife. With any sort of luck, this thing could outlive me by centuries."

He set the vase on the edge of his desk, leaned back in his chair. "Keats had the right idea. Look at this flower." He pointed to the carved stone blossom. "Never to die—to remain in bloom for years and years." Intense, a reading child, he drew the word *years* out.

"Do you forget the drawbacks?" My voice so sudden seemed shrill. It pierced the small room, quivered in the corners. "Never to have color, beauty . . ."

"Yes, but then you have nothing to worry about. You have a strong solid shape; there are no nights spent thinking what you'll do when your beauty's gone—when you're old. You are strong, sure of what you are and what your limits are."

He was speaking hurried, distracted. Realizing his native language was filling foreign ears, he was explaining something wrong he believed in, he started.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to go poetic on you." He stretched his legs into a pile of books. And brought his heels to rest on the ruins.

It was May—the very center of May. You could see the spring well from Carson's office in a red brick building on a hill overlooking the football field and a long blue wood. A string of boys moved off the field, down a slow hill, across a green gap,

onto a dusty road, and threaded into the woods. Grounds men prepared for a track meet. A bent man in white coveralls painted in the top corner of the grandstand. A yellow bus turned up by the track, and spilled boys in green shorts and shirts in groups to different parts of the field.

"I like it here." He was standing at the window. "But it's a terrible thing to be constantly mindful of time—that's the one drawback of teaching, for me at least. There's a time for everything, a certain lecture for each day in each week. A certain material that must be covered in a month. There is always a pattern of happenings and then a termination. My life is so set I could tell you now my whole schedule for the next two years."

The track meet started below. Counterpoint: shouts of the athletes, hush of the crowds. Then the crowds stirred, began a steady ascent of rage, to parallel the final lap of the distance race. The race was won. The rage descended in scattered applause to anticipation.

Carson sat at his desk and began to rummage. "Oh, well, end of term, clean out your drawers."

The next week we started exams, and two weeks later we graduated. I did not see Carson again until graduation day, when I met him on the steps in front of the auditorium. He invited me to dinner for a Saturday.

## II

Carson's house, too, was on a hill. You took the highway that passed just outside the campus and followed it climbing for two miles. You turned onto a very treed lane, running back for half a mile to an end. There were many houses along the lane—all

small, new, modern colonial, compensated by large lots. His was two from the end, set back in a semi-circle driveway. Carson was out front watering his flowers.

"It's good to see you, Jim." I had just graduated from James.

By the sounds and smell and weight of air, it was early summer. Two houses back on the other side of the lane there was a barbecue. Claps of laughter and children's shouts rose behind a green hedge under a string of red and blue lights. A man called a dog. A car started. A screen door slammed-hollow.

The water, fresh on the flowers, brought out color. I walked with Carson to the back yard and waited while he put the hose away.

He had a long yard which ended in a white fence before a steep slope down to the College. Strips of woods between streets of houses all the way down. At the bottom, in a dark knot against a further rising land, was the College. Half down on the left, the highway appeared, moved down to touch the edge of the College.

It was dark now by the College—a touch of light appeared. We were standing in the last of the daylight. And Carson talked of little things: teachers on leave, new contracts, air conditioners in the offices.

The heavy air was thinning with night. Headlights appeared on the highway. A radio next door caught the beginning of a ball game. "...the ho...me of the br...av...ee." Applause and whistles. "Hello, Fans! This Charlie Bar . . ."

". . . so they should put new ones in next year." Carson was still talking air conditioners.

". . . for New York tonight Warren . . ." The radio went off.

Carson kicked a small stone

through the space in the fence, and we walked back to the top of the yard.

"On nights like this, sometimes I feel like going out and getting into a good brawl." He was bouncing his right fist against his open palm. "Not the kind where someone gets hurt or stabbed. Just the Irish kind, where you land a few good punches and have a few good punches landed on you."

We sat on the patio in white cast-iron furniture. He with knees crossed, drumming his fingers on the arms of the chair. When he talked after some minutes, it was like a camera panning in from far. He waved, searching, touching many little points around, and then, finding a spot, he centered.

"You know, I sometimes have a feeling—" He was staring out and still drumming his fingers. "I sometimes feel that one morning some irresistible force is going to knock the coffee cup out of my hands and pull me out of the house and stand me on a hill somewhere. And there I'll see things I haven't seen before and places I haven't been to." He mumbled something, a sigh, a groan, then stretched. "Yes. It's spring. And I'm thirty-five years old and married—oh, let's go eat."

Carson's wife was a woman you always met at the end of something, or as you were leaving somewhere. She would wave across a scattering of heads as you were backing out of a student-faculty affair. Or bump into you as you left the supermarket. You might see her in the stark light of the lobby as you left the Drama Society's latest production. She would have a coat over her arms, and a strand of her very blond hair would fly loose as she searched for a face.

She was the same that night. Even in the kind comfort of the house, she cast about as if searching. She had turned to her thirties, and the inevitable was there in a few wisps of hair, the roll beneath her chin, and the round way of her body. Now, after eight years, all I remember is the promise of an amiable old woman.

There were a boy and girl too. But they only appeared as a tricycle and a stack of toys in the corner of the porch.

\*

After dinner, in the smooth warmth, we sat on the patio and talked.

Sometimes you hear a murmur of music from a house you pass in the night, and after when you try to remember it, it stays just out of speech—as a rising, falling thing. That was how the evening passed. I remember certain things—crickets in the garden, ice on glass, car doors shutting solid, a thin goodbye far down the lane—the bourgeois sounds; preparing for sleep. But all these are only pieces of something; words do not fit them, will not.

Long after the ice had turned to water in my glass and the crickets had taken over the night, I said goodbye to restless Carson.

### III

That summer I went to work in the city and began a correspondence with Carson. His letters were short and consisted largely of campus talk. Toward the end of March his letters became less frequent, and by the middle of April they stopped.

I did not think often of Carson after April. Sometimes when I stirred

through my desk for a paperclip or pencil, I would come upon the stack of his letters and wonder if he got his new air conditioner, was still teaching in the night school, if the man who shared his office was still borrowing and not returning Carson's poetry books and if . . . I would find what I had been needing, close the drawer with a promise to write tomorrow, and forget him.

Not until the tail end of a city July afternoon—I had come onto his letters twice that morning—did I remember enough to go looking for him.

It was a long drive to his house, but the leaving of the city made it pleasant. I had grown tired of the omnipotence of the tall buildings in the sun. It saddened me, as I turned down Carson's lane, to suddenly realize that even here there was a certain haughty assurance. The click of sprinklers on grass and the sight of the well-appointed hedges made assurance that summer would always be here at this spot, that the sun would always set warm as now, that there was as much of moment here as in the flashing city.

I did not notice Mrs. Carson until I reached the foot of the porch steps. She was standing in the door, framed

by a vague light far back in the house.

"Hello." She did not answer; stood dark-faced in the shadows of the doorway. She was haloed, back-lighted.

"I've come to see Mr. Carson."

The answer came from the shadows in the hollow of the doorway, perhaps, not quite from herself.

"He's gone."

Her words, final, the resigned turn to close the door, the quench of light—all mounted to climax. I did not understand.

"He didn't . . . tell . . . when he'd be back?"

"No, he's just gone. He did not say if he'd be back."

She closed the door in the night, and I walked back to the car suddenly thinking of the weary ride to the city.

#### IV

There is no more to report. Eight years since I talked to Carson. I know all of his actions. But not why. A bit of music staying out of speech. Night vision: in darkness, the things best seen by looking aside. The story which is not here.



# The Lion at Morning

• David C. King

Henry Grable didn't want to be a hero. He fought against it, in fact. He shrugged and evaded when reporters pressed him for details. "Don't worry," he told his wife over and over. "I haven't changed. I'm not any different. I wish everyone would just forget about it and leave me alone."

And he meant what he said. He sincerely, thoroughly desired to be left alone.

He had always known, or at least had sensed, that the American public had a voracious appetite for the sensational. There seemed to be some bizarre need in the average man to fill the voids in his own life by vicariously sharing the thrills experienced by others. Yellow journalism—that sort of thing.

But now, in the short space of two days, he had learned something more: that the public was actually a living, breathing thing, an entity separate from its individual members, and it tried to grab you and hold on to you. The whole is *not* equal to the sum of its parts, he thought. The whole is greater. Different, anyway.

He faced the impending ceremonial dinner exactly as he had faced everything else that happened in the past forty-eight hours—with a mixture of confusion and embarrassment. And the public liked that, because he was already being described as the "quiet" hero, the "unassuming" hero. The popping flashbulbs, the flood lights, the avalanche of questions—

he would never be able to get used to any of it. It made him wonder how other celebrities—permanent celebrities like movie stars and great athletes—could become adjusted to this environment of constant chaos, where even a simple thing like walking down the street became a tremendous ordeal.

He was ready for the dinner; at least he was as ready as he was likely to be. He went downstairs. Agnes was bustling about the kitchen, fussing around with a myriad of last-minute details that really didn't need doing.

She straightened his tie, as he knew she would, and he submitted with the same patient resignation he submitted to everything. She looked worried.

"Don't worry," he said, not knowing how many times he had said it now. "It will be over soon. Then you'll find I'm exactly the same old fuddy-duddy I was before."

"I know," she said, with the worry in her voice. "But they keep after you so. I don't know where it's all going to end. And now there's all this talk about having you run for the City Council. It just doesn't seem right somehow. . . ."

He put his hands gently on her shoulders and made her look at him, the way he used to a dozen years before, even before they were married. "Don't listen to them," he said. "It's ridiculous. I don't know what kind of a person they think I am that

I'd take advantage of this thing to climb up in the world. Nobody has any sense of decency anymore."

They sat in the living room and waited, and somehow even the furniture, the lamps, his wife's prized floral drapes didn't look the same. Just like at the office. Everything was the same there, too, only different. Everyone looked at him in a peculiar way; they spoke to him as though he were a stranger. Somewhere a gap had opened between him and his world, and it gave him an uncomfortable, somewhat insecure, feeling. He longed for life to go back to normal.

Finally, the car came. A sleek, glistening limousine with a chauffeur. It was funny, he thought, as they went out the door, two days ago he would have thought that chauffeurs had all but disappeared from the American scene. Now, in this short space of time, he'd seen a dozen or more.

It gave him a strange feeling, too, to walk out to the car with his wife. He couldn't help but notice that just about everyone in the neighborhood dropped what he was doing in order to watch. And there was Mrs. Crosley, who hadn't spoken to them in months, across the street peering from behind the curtains. He couldn't suppress a quick tinge of pride.

They rode downtown in the noiseless vehicle. The driver never said a word, as though he were merely a part of the silent machine. People stared at them. One or two waved and he wondered if they really knew who he was. When another car pulled abreast of them at a light and the occupants stared in at them, they both wriggled a little uncomfortably.

A small crowd was cluttered around the hotel entrance. They set up a ragged cheer and called his

name when he stepped out of the car. Embarrassed, he whisked Agnes through the revolving doors.

The lobby was crowded and noisy, as it had been one time when he'd been there for a convention. They had to wait for the elevator.

A woman separated herself from a small knot of people and plucked at his sleeve. She was a large woman, with the overbearing look of a mother who yells at her kids. She was wearing an ugly violet dress, and two dark perspiration stains spread like water wings under her arms.

"Excuse me," she said, with a smile that was at once apologetic and demanding. "I just wanted to say I thought you done a wonderful thing."

He mumbled a word of thanks and glanced a little desperately at the elevator door. It was still closed. He couldn't get away from her.

"My brother-in-law was one of the ones that didn't make it," she said. Her voice went up a notch in volume, and she looked around as people pressed closer to hear.

"Yes," she went on, "It was awful. His wife—that's my husband's sister—had watcha call a premonition. 'Don't go, Harry,' she said. 'Something's going to happen.' But of course he just laughed."

The elevator doors slid open. He started to pull away, but she was still clutching his arm.

"They found him in the ruins," she said. "His skull was crushed, right here." She tapped her forehead. "The doc said he never stood a chance. I had to go identify the body. You couldn't even recognize him."

Henry finally managed to free his imprisoned sleeve. Agnes was already in the elevator, staring at him.

"Of course," the woman pursued,

"I been with his wife all day, trying to comfort her, ya' know. But I just had to come down. . . ."

Her voice trailed off. He thanked her again and ducked into the elevator.

There were others in the elevator, so he couldn't say anything to Agnes. Two men shook hands with him.

The banquet room was jammed with people, and white-coated busboys seemed to be everywhere. Something had happened to the cooling system, so the air was heavy and too uncomfortable for eating.

Mayor Caulfield grabbed him immediately and led him around to different groups, introducing him to people. He recognized a few names he'd seen in the papers, but the other names and the titles slipped right past him.

Finally, they sat down to eat. The mayor sat on one side of him and Agnes on the other. She looked incredibly pale and only picked at her food. Henry didn't have much of an appetite either. He didn't even notice what they were eating, except that the gelatin salad had melted into an unedible green mess. Caulfield kept bending toward him, muttering some-

thing about politics or elections or why Henry should let the party draft him.

The speeches afterward embarrassed him as he had known they would. And then he had to say a few words. A sea of mask-like faces stared up at him; they seemed to expect him to say something important.

He stumbled through a dozen sentences and sat down. Everyone applauded. It was nearly over. Chairs scraped. Voices began to fill the room.

The newsmen came to the speakers' table. They wanted pictures. People were shoved out of the way while the photographers asked the main dignitaries to group together. He lost sight of Agnes. There was a lot of jostling and talking and confusion.

Suddenly he found himself in the back with three or four men crowded in front of him. Something like panic seized him. He wriggled his way between two of the men, shoving one of them a little off balance, and emerged at the front of the group.

He saw Agnes. Their eyes met. Just for a split second, but it was long enough to tell them both more than they had ever been able to say to each other.



# Elegy

(for a young skier: S.W.B.)

• Alfred Hills

The evening sun  
turns the granite faces of the hills  
to golden, iridescent angles.  
And snows receding fast in sudden thaw  
reflect the death of Winter  
In the music of the roaring streams  
on quiet twilit nights.  
Renewal in the frozen earth awaits  
the warmer season,  
now portends,  
and hesitates  
between the future's promise  
and the frozen past.

In this tempestuous climate of transition,  
your final mastery of the heights  
has dimmed the brilliance of your happy mountains  
where down their crystal-powdered slopes you sped  
split-second-steed of nerve and muscle  
beneath those Winter skies so darkly blue,  
the snow so fiercely white:  
We welcomed you.

In the guttering light of Winter afternoons  
you blazed with laughter, warmth, and wit.  
And into the deepening winter nights  
you suffered the Carnival of Fools:  
We noted that you turned away from it.

For you returned to us each morn,  
faithful and true,  
to the fastness of the mountain's peace  
and the wind in the pines whispering  
Matins, and Lauds:

We welcomed you.

You carved new paths  
through trackless snows,  
and mastered the tests  
that we carefully made:  
The devilish slopes,  
the slip of the skis,  
you stumbled and fell  
returning again to Matins and Lauds  
Faithful and true:

We welcomed you.

And when we heard that you had fled  
too fast from fools, at fatal speed  
to seek our mountains' peace instead  
We splendidly fulfilled

your dream  
your need:

For since you truly loved  
those pure and deathless things,

Now  
In Timeless Peace,  
We Welcome You.

## Crumbling Old Establishments

● Edgar L. Biamonte

Over withering hair once nailed impeccably right  
to unwavering well-furred roofs now unshingling  
from wild winds tendering unfair, despair,  
for while cedaried attics once unmisted  
prehistoric logic imbedded in ancient well-trunked volumes,  
immediate stories below tomorrow's minds might wrest less.

And because overlooked you snap another old establishment  
once thought liberally roomed (to quarter tempests whole),  
as demolition nakedly crunches away, despair,  
for though stately oaks accidentally beamed about such flaws,  
well-wrought foundations, salvaged, would support some hopes of yours.

And while thinking detached you spectacle about your cause—  
dusting lungs unaware—one again despair,  
for antiques match less to your outnumbering mode  
and from similar squalls thundering unexpectedly about  
your mansions one day shall weather-beaten fall.

# Going Swimming

• William Virgil Davis

We went, the five of us,  
To break the sky's skin  
At a place called Dow Lake.  
I didn't fit the group.  
We were a family of four,  
And a family of one. No  
One would know I didn't  
Belong to the wedding ring  
She wore, that those four  
Little ones weren't mine.  
I confess I looked like a  
Father. I even felt like  
One as I helped these tiny  
Wiggling girls to stay  
Afloat on water and sun.  
(They believed all the  
Stories I told.) I confess  
That I, with the boy, had  
Less success. Older and male,  
He knew me for what I was  
And didn't submit to childish  
Pranks and play. We played  
Some water catch; I found  
Myself chasing the ball  
To the tunes of his glee,  
Then being splashed when  
It hit in front of me. I  
Too tried to laugh. I confess  
That I felt uneasy lying  
In the sand beside this  
Mother of four, hearing  
The youngest, just beginning  
To talk, say Daddy at me,  
Mommy at her, forcing me  
To the words others must  
Have been hearing in their  
Heads. The children's mother  
Tried to understand, tried  
To help me understand. She  
Was a comfort, but not a  
Consolation. So, surrogate  
Father, I sat and sifted

Sand between my fingers,  
Built castles, collected  
Balls and pails, shovels  
And towels, thongs and diapers.  
When we left, I drove and  
Was silent. Beside me, a wife  
Not my own, chattered. Arrived  
Home, she thanked me, and  
Took her brood inside. My  
Family of one turned around  
And drove to another house  
Not far away, trying to say  
If I would ever be a possible  
Father, a believable husband,  
Have a swimming wife.

## The Spoiled Child

• Charles Edward Eaton

The child had a smear of raspberry jam across her mouth  
Like a crack in a darling figured little pot of sweetmeats—  
Could it be that too much love can stunt our growth?

No doubt, and yet we bring her honey if not jam,  
Plying, stuffing, making her almost helpless as a queen bee  
In the heavily scented garden of: You take my love,  
therefore I am.

Nothing but silk next to her skin and nothing coarser  
than velours outside:  
It makes it so much easier to forget the hairshirt that one wears  
Or the harsh, insidious, cocoon constructed of rawhide.

There is always the plump hand to be smeared with sticky kisses,  
A paunch to be pommeled, a watch fob to be pulled:  
The child quickly senses if we withhold one milligram  
of hoarded blisses.

Sad, sweet, complicity—lovely and unlovable—  
To feed her creams and jellies because we feel so sick!—  
How can anyone be quite so grossly empty if that dear child  
is full?

There is never, never an end of love, never enough *bonbon*—  
The spoiled one will soon be drowsy, stupefied,  
And we can browse among our dreams of infanta or *l'aiglon*.



## Contributors

**R**OBERT JOE STOUT writes from Texas: "I still live in Austin, still write. We have four children now, however, the oldest just starting school, God help him. I will have other stories soon in the *New Orleans Review*, *Genesis: Grasp and Arx*"; he has been a frequent contributor to this magazine. THOMAS KRETZ, S.J., says that "after teaching three years in Chile," he is now back at studies in Wheeling College and working on poetry and some translations of South American poets. BIRON WALKER, associate professor of English at the University of Florida and co-editor of *College English: The First Year, Imaginative Literature*, and *The Modern Essay*, has recently published poems in such magazines as *The Georgia Review*, *Poet and Critic*, *The Florida Quarterly*, and *New Orleans Review*. LOUIS HASLEY writes that "other articles on humorous writers, not yet published, have been accepted recently by the *Mark Twain Journal*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Arizona Quarterly*"; he is a professor of English at the University of Notre Dame. PAUL RAMSEY has appeared frequently in *four quarters*. MICHAEL KOCH, a recent graduate of La Salle College, has had several stories accepted for publication in this magazine. DAVID C. KING is employed as editorial director for school services at the Foreign Policy Association in New York and has just finished a book called *International Education for Spaceship Earth*, which will be published this spring; he is working on a novel. ALFRED HILLS lives in Vail, Colorado, where he is a steelworker on the mountain there, erecting towers for the new gondola. EDGAR L. BIAMONTE lives in Spencer, New York. WILLIAM VIRGIL DAVIS has published poems in journals and scholarly periodicals, including *The Nation*, *Ann Arbor Review*, *The Kentucky Review*, and *The Christian Century*. CHARLES EDWARD EATON, poet and fiction writer, has had his work appear in numerous magazines and has completed two volumes of short stories. CLAUDE KOCH, professor of English, La Salle College, is a novelist and short story writer.

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